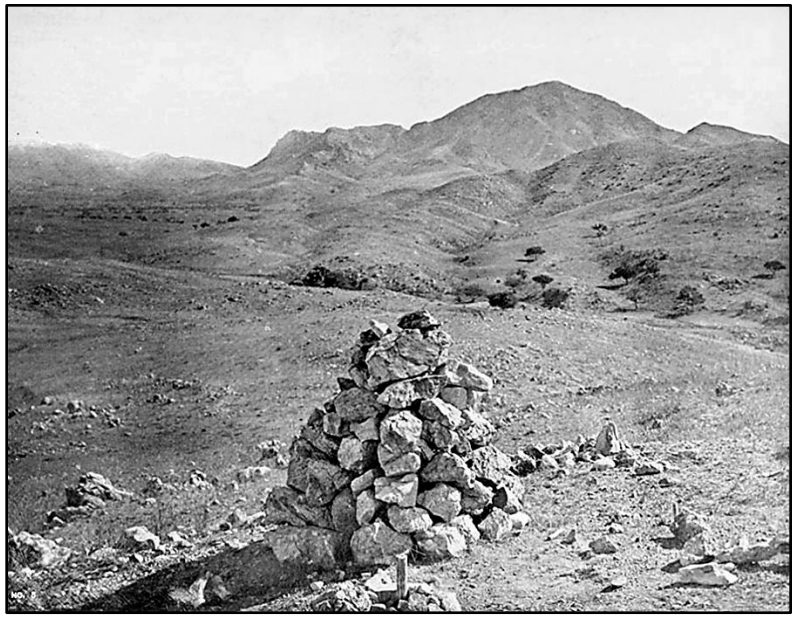
BISBEE ROAD



THOMAS D. YOUNG

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No man for any considerable period can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

—Bob Dylan

PART ONE

1. William Delaney

He crossed over the line into Mexico around midday on a Monday, December 15, 1883, riding up on a boundary marker somewhere just north of the pueblo of Naco. The marker was a simple cairn of stones and had the look of something arbitrary and provisional, though he imagined it was official enough. He stopped alongside and lifted himself in the saddle to look around. There was nothing except desert to see: a neutral landscape of dun soil and creosote bushes and organpipe cactus. Desolate enough but a desolation he was used to. He wondered if this land had ever been otherwise—if this represented the fallen state of something once lush and verdant. It seemed unlikely, but he knew that land changed over time. Mountains rose up from out of the earth, droughts blew the soil away, earthquakes rent things asunder. The Mexico he was looking at had been this Mexico for a long time, though, and he could see no reason to try to imagine it otherwise.

He took one final moment to look around, then started up his horse. He carried no map but he knew that by continuing steadily to the southeast he would strike the Agua Prieta road some thirty miles distant. He knew further, or so he had been told, that one hundred miles south of that point he would reach the headwaters of the Río Moctezuma, near a pueblo of that same name. By following the river south he could then reach the pueblo of Batuc, his destination. In Batuc there was a sawmill in need of an engineer. Or so he had been told. The distance of his journey was said to be some 250 miles. Give or take.

The thought occurred to him that, having reached the Río Moctezuma and the imaginary-sounding place of Batuc, he might take passage on a boat and make his way to the sea—if

indeed that was where that river led. But then he would have a new choice to make. Board another boat, bound for another equally imaginary-sounding destination. The Antilles, Cartagena, Cusco. Put a purpose to it like the imaginary-sounding job of sawmill engineer.

But this was his present journey, and so he turned easterly, putting the escarpment of the Sierra Occidental on his right quarter. All that afternoon he rode through flats grown up in sage and greasewood, all the same, all different. The earth underfoot was loose and stony, a likely place for a horse to misstep and come up lame, and so he rode easily, letting the horse find its own way across the broken terrain. At nightfall he made a fireless camp on a gravel spall well up off the desert floor and sat looking out at the serrated peaks surrounding him. The mountains, he knew, were farther away than they appeared and more broken down than they had once been. Still, their silhouettes alone had the power to draw men with the intoxication of sudden wealth—great veins of gold and silver laid bare on the mountains' flanks or washed out into the streambeds. He had known many prospectors since he came west, had been one himself for a time. Men went into those mountains seeking that placer gold and were never heard from again. Los hambrientos, the Mexicans called them. The hungry ones.

Before dawn he was up and back in the saddle. The winter sun rose high in the sky. The landscape continued as before, spotted with branching cholla and burro bushes. He did not stop. He ate jerked meat from his saddlebag and watered his horse at whatever tanks and tinajas and mudholes he came upon. By afternoon the terrain had begun to steepen, and then he was in among the foothills of the Sierra Madre. The spine of the Sierra de los Ajos appeared in the west. Signs of human habitation were few, the land having little to offer. He saw only the occasional patchwork jacal, walled and roofed in ocotillo staves and scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding desert. The same man who had told him about the engineering job in Batuc—a magistrate in Tombstone

named Spicer—had told him also that the land he would be riding through, though now largely unpeopled, had once been part of the mighty kingdom of Opatería. The Opata were a numerous race, Spicer said, living together in rancherías of several thousand people and growing beans, maize, squash and cotton by means of elaborate systems of irrigation. They were skilled weavers of baskets and blankets, crafters of pottery from a distinctive green clay. But then the Spanish had come and found silver in their land, and after them the Mexicans and then the Apache—driven south by the Comanche—and finally the North Americans. Like predatory sharks drawn to the placid, basking whale, Spicer said. At present there were thought to be only a few hundred Opata left, their language, religion and customs forever lost, their entire race absorbed into the general mongrel population of mestizo Mexican peasantry. "Boundless and bare," Spicer had said, drawing his hand slowly through the air of his office on Toughnut Street. "The lone and level sands stretch far away."

In the morning there was frost on the ground and a low-hanging patchy mist. He stopped for a moment to watch two mule deer who were peering out from within a nearby cedar brake. They were reddish gray in color with white rump patches and standing so close together, side by side, seemed some strange, two-headed beast. The way southeast now lay among terraces and rock benches and raised gravel beds interspersed with open meadows and stands of oak and pine. He moved along, automatically evaluating each new stretch of country as it presented itself, making whatever adjustments necessary while hewing to his southeasterly course. He had a good horse, and he let him partner in the process. Like the mule deer, they were a duple beast, horse and rider. The rider's job was to establish their general direction, the horse's to decide where he put his feet. They crossed alkali flats and stretches of malpais laid down centuries before by volcanoes and bowl-like playas, the ghosts of dead lakes. He had spent much of the past ten years—the time he had been in the

West—riding horseback across every conceivable type of terrain and it was the one thing he thought he did well.

It was at the end of his second day that he struck the Agua Prieta road. It was only a crude wagon track but it seemed well traveled, and he put his horse onto it, heading south. He circled what he took to be the village of Fronteras—a low clutch of adobe buildings set back atop a little plateau—then returned to the road. It was only then, fully two days out, that he began to feel that he might outdistance the troubles pursuing him. He rode slowly, ever watchful, bringing himself back whenever his mind drifted too far. This was a new land, one with which he had no connection. He passed the occasional rancho standing off the road and saw a few lank cattle but no people. The entire landscape had a look of abandonment, as if the people had fled some general calamity. The garden plots stood bare and the corrals empty, the latticed ocotillo fences safeguarding nothing. Despoblado, Spicer had called it, and that seemed about right. He looked again at the barren steppe, the high sun. What kind of life would be possible in such a place, and what manner of people could choose it? The meek. The desperate. The fugitive. The basking whale of the Opata nation, dedicated to their pot making and maize growing. Seekers of peace. For others the desert was a place of trial and self-abnegation. He had heard Spicer speak in awe of the last stretch of desert on the El Dorado Trail running north out of Mexico. 'El Camino de Diablo,' he said with a reverence bordering on the mystical. 'The high road to hell. A cautionary tale of the life to come. Two hundred fifty miles without a single sup of water, a single tree. Where spittle, if you could make any, dried before it hit the ground. A jumble of bones every hundred yards, like runes to be read. And sometimes not just bones but whole mummified corpses. Takes a dead body a long time to break down in such ungodly desiccation.' He smiled thinking of Spicer telling it. Of how he and his partner, a jackleg preacher named Jack Straw, on their way to the California gold fields had happened upon a former acquaintance in such a state,

'baked like crusty loaf from the oven' but still recognizable. 'We had just seen him in Sebastopol, Texas, about six months back. Said he was coming this way. Said he would meet us in Fresno. And here we come upon him sitting against a rock like he was keeping an eye on the passing traffic. Wearing the same purple shirt and yellow hat he had on back in the Horseshoe Saloon in Sebastopol.' 'Aint that Brother Potts settin over there?' Straw had asked. 'Somebody needs to tell him to come in out of the sun. He's looking a little chapped.'

But this Agua Prieta road was no Devil's Highway, neither ordeal nor cautionary tale. There seemed only some subtle astringency at work, a paring away, something that drew off the dross. The newness and emptiness of the land spoke to him. The destination he had in mind was more or less a formality. The farther south he got, the more he felt it: the neutrality of the place, foreign although not unfamiliar. A man could get his bearings here. He could find a spot—it didn't have to be much—and set himself down. Start again upon another different life without expectations, just a blank canvas to be filled in by circumstance.

As he proceeded, he felt confirmed in this impression. The landscape began to change. It grew less harsh, more varied. The mesas pushed in, some forested green. The mountains, closer too, were enclosed in deep purple—draped, it seemed, in perpetual mist and rain. There were groves of oak and mountain cedar, wild grapevines, beds of cactus and drooping white trumpet flowers. Cottonwoods grew in the riverbeds. It seemed a different foreign country from the one into which he had first crossed. Signs of human habitation increased. On a long gentle stretch of road he met a boy of perhaps ten leading a burro-drawn travois. Delaney stopped and moved off the track to allow the boy to pass, touching his hat in the customary manner of fellow travelers. It was only after he had passed that Delaney looked back and saw an old woman lying on the sled. Her eyes were closed, and she was bundled in a dark blanket and a rebozo and holding a wooden

crucifix to her chest. He thought at first that she might be dead, but as he sat watching her she lifted the crucifix in what might have been a blessing or gesture of good will. He tried imagining where the boy might be taking her. To or from a curandero, to the home of relatives into whose care she was passing, to a morada or chapel somewhere deep in the woods. An errand, in any event, of grave importance to be entrusted to someone so young and an opportunity for him to prove himself worthy.

He saw other things. He saw a man picking his way across a gravel patch holding a guitar by the neck. He saw a young girl drawing water from a well with a leather bucket, but when he stopped in the road to watch a woman emerged from the doorway of the jacal and called her in. He saw two men with hoes dressed in white smocks turning up a plot of nettles. There were fields of sallow blossoms that could have been sunflowers or poppies and set back into the hillside he could see the red-tiled roofs of large houses. He passed a grove of pecan trees and fields of peanuts and agave and a stone grinding wheel and a shallow pit that he knew was for the roasting of the agave hearts to make mescal. He saw burros and short-horned cattle grazing beneath the trees. In one meadow he stopped to watch a little spotted colt chase a slightly older foal, this one white, round and round in a flashing, intricate design of guile and change of pace. Although all recognizable, these scenes seemed set somehow in a world apart. He imagined it as a sort of newly created world, which in his case it was.

When he saw the smoke from the smelters of the mining town of Nacozari he again turned and left the road, riding off through a stand of carrizo cane. It was here that the Río Moctezuma had its source, and once he had circled the town and returned to the road he could see the river on his left hand—shallow, rocky, making its way south between steep wooded bluffs. The road followed the river's course, and he kept to it as much as possible, steering off only when he saw or heard other riders approaching. When darkness came, he

slept up in among the trees. The days had been cool and dry and the nights cold. Dark clouds remained above the cordillera and sometimes he could see lightning there, but here below it did not rain. In his saddlebag he had a deerskin pouch containing three or four dollars in copper and silver coins, and on the fifth day of his journey he stopped at a cantina in a place called Los Hoyos to buy food. It was a low, ill-lit place but he had seen worse. Two men stood drinking at the bar, their heads close together. They turned to look at him. Through a curtain in the rear he could see a pot on a brazier, and when a woman came out he asked if he could buy some food. The beans came to him in an old lidded coffee can and the tortillas wrapped in a sheet of newspaper. He laid his coins on the bar, and she chose the three smallest ones.

He nooned that day in a grove of pine trees well off the road, staking his horse nearby. The beans were of a kind known as borracho and heavily spiked with peppers. It was a kind of food he could not have imagined before he came west but now he knew little else. He ate while reading what he could from the smudged page of the Hermosillo newspaper: an advertisement for a bootmaker, the announcement of a performance by Angela Peralta, El Ruiseñor Mexicano, to be held on July 8. It didn't say what year. He thought that ruiseñor might be the Spanish word for nightingale and that Hermosillo, the city's name, meant something like 'Little Beautiful One.' One of those Spanish diminutives that shrank to something less and less, until it seemed just to disappear. When he had finished the last tortilla he lay back and tipped his hat down over his eyes. He could feel the warmth of the food in his belly and smell the pines. His thoughts lingered in this world where he found himself—even stranger to imagine now with his eyes closed—but by then he was asleep and dreaming. He was in some Southern city. Charleston, he thought. Roanoke. Savannah. Some place he had never been. He had been sleeping on a bare floor in an upstairs room, and now he sat up and looked out onto the harbor where the black

hulls of many ships lay pressed up against one another. Two old men stood on the dock smoking their pipes. Something was wrong to have so many black hulls crowded together, their noses in the air like competing animals. The harbormaster would be hearing from them. One man removed his pipe and turned to nod up in his direction. He looked at the convergent ships, wondering what it was he could be expected to do. Their decks were piled high with some dark cargo, crates and barrels and bags, stacked so high they were about to topple over. The former possessions of refugees, perhaps, disembarked so hastily that they had left everything. The other man did not speak or remove his pipe. He put his foot on the gunwale of the nearest ship to keep it from coming any closer.

It was the sound of his horse cropping the grass that woke him. In his dream the sound had had been something unidentifiable, but he had taken it for the scraping of the weed-covered keels as they rocked on the slack water. He lay there for a few moments, allowing the dream to dissolve. When he opened his eyes he was in among the Mexican pines, the Mexican sky a pale blue. The smell was of baking stone. He listened for the call of the ruiseñor. He thought of the names of other Mexican birds he knew. Los cuervos. El búho. Los patos. Las palomas. Others that he would have to learn to complete the reality of the place.

He had lifted his hat and turned to look toward his horse when he saw the serpent. It was lying within a yard of his face, stubby, slender as a whipcord and banded in bright colors of red, black and cream. It had its head hidden beneath its body and its tail exposed, the tail making an odd popping sound. He had seen snakes before. They were a staple of almost every sort of work he had ever done, the bane of sleeping cowboys, hunters in the woods, miners in the dark. He had seen pits filled with writhing balls of them. He had seen timber rattlers migrating over open range. In Charleston, Arizona, he had frequented a saloon where a nine-foot gopher snake, renowned for its rat-killing abilities, had free run of the place. That snake's name was Charley, and it was not unusual to find card

players in the middle of a hand lifting their feet to allow the reptile to pass beneath the table. The thing before him now was something different. Its coloration seemed a declaration of something that would not be left unseen. The popping sound of its tail was very different from the dry rustling menace of the diamondbacks he had met. He had no way of assessing the danger it presented, but judging by its appearance—blunt-headed, gaudy, almost bejeweled—it had the look of some venomous asp of legend. Perhaps it was a creature unique to Mexico, the hallucinated replica of a serpent. Even with the unscrolling of its tongue, it could have been something artificial, like the fancy beadwork chokers and gauntlets favored by some cowboys.

He lay still, watching it taste the air with its tongue, the twin ellipses of its eyes conveying something very old. He could not see himself there, but he knew he was. He lay motionless, listening for his horse. The sounds of it tugging up the grass had ceased. Finally he had to turn. He could not afford to be left horseless in this country. And so, very slowly, he moved his head. The horse was nuzzling among the lower branches of the pine, scratching itself, evidently unperturbed. Such had been his experience with horses. Although occasionally snake bit, they paid snakes little mind. He turned slowly back. With their gazes now disconnected, the snake was moving. Already it had uncoiled itself and was sliding though an almost invisible joining in the rock, erasing itself like a magic trick. He lay watching the last quarter inch of its lacquered tail linger for a moment in the upper world before it too was gone.

He rose then and got to his feet. He still had his hat in his hand. He went to his horse, which was still nosing among the pine branches. In passing he gave it a swat on the hindquarter. The horse shook his head but didn't look back.

—You let something like that slip up on a man without no warning? Not even a snort or a snicker? I thought we was pards. Now you've give me cause to wonder.

* * *

The last portion of his journey, extending from the town of Moctezuma to Batuc, covered a distance of some thirty miles. The road wound its way among bluffs and wooded cutbanks and a series of low mountains, the terrain deeply scored with rocky washes. These arroyos were dry now, but their ruggedness bespoke the pent-up violence of the land. Strangely, flash floods were endemic to the waterless Sonoran desert. The cowboys called them chubascos, summer monsoons that could convert these bone-dry ravines into raging rivers in seconds. Rain falling in the sierras made its way quickly downward through gashes and sluiceways carved over the eons into the rock. He had seen some, been told of others. Of cowboys camped in some gulch or bajada waking to hear it coming down on them like a freight train. Of a wall of water sweeping away men, horses and herd and depositing them miles away, arranging them dead in some distant canyon and leaving the original place as before. He had ridden with men who found a cosmic purpose there.

The land bore other such signs of chaos. Slides of talus and shale, obsidian boulders the size of haywagons thrown down by avalanche, earthquake, vulcanism. Many of these surfaces bore inscriptions left by human hands, as if to provide some commentary on this state of things. Fringed swirls and geometric shapes and animal forms—spider, box turtle, bird-like humans—petroglyphs in imitation of the world or meant as additions to it. Sometimes even a series of human handprints as self-testament to those that had done the drawing. As he passed along the road these panels comprised an irregular gallery of sorts, a faintly whimsical messaging across time. As if there was some sort of joke to share. He had seen these human markings in other places. He had spent a winter in Utah four years previous, and these signs were everywhere—a compulsive annotation and encryption of the earth. He had told Spicer about them—about those cliff-

dwellers, the Old Ones—and Spicer in turn had told him about the Opata.

It was around noon of the following day, the seventh of his journey, that he crossed a gravel bar and a shallow stream and saw the pueblo of Batuc standing in the offing. Beside the stream a horse stood watching him. It was saddleless, wearing only a headstall with its reins hanging loose. He looked about for its rider but could see no one. Just outside town he passed a large cemetery shadowed blue and festooned with stepped crosses and ragged pieces of crepe and bearing dates extending back two hundred years. A high church tower, gleaming white, rose above the center of the town. He had seen similar edifices in presidios north of the border, remnants of the first days of the Spanish arrival, but nothing so elaborate as this. He watched it reveal itself as he rode slowly forward. It was constructed not of adobe bricks but of quarried stone, with a pillared façade rising in three tiers and topped by a bell tower. Once he was close enough he could make out the images carved into the keystone of the arch above the doorway: a bearded man with a shepherd's crook holding a child in his elbow and supported from beneath by tiny gnomic figures. Passing beneath it, Delaney studied this depiction, more addenda like the messaging on the rocks. Could these small betrodden figures be the Opata, absent now in the flesh but here memorialized? He could see the marks of chisel and adze upon the stone. The quarry, he imagined, must be located somewhere back in the sierra, the lives of generations of Indians perhaps defined by that daily circuit back and forth, like the slaves who had constructed Pharoah's pyramids—this an irony that may or may not have occurred to the evangelizing priests and friars. As for himself, he had spent a considerable time among miners in Leadville and Tombstone and Millville, had heard the bell summoning the miners below and then releasing them from their labors ten hours later. Had seen their faces as blank as corpses emerging from the tomb. Unlike the human miners, the mules that pulled the loaded cars were kept

permanently below, in perpetual darkness, it having proved nearly impossible to force them back down into the shafts once they had been returned to the light.

The layout of Batuc was as he had imagined. He had seen Santa Fe, Tucson, San Antonio. Fronting the church was a plaza with a fountain and a bandstand and some iron benches. At this hour there were few people about. Some of the doorways bore cedar boughs and clusters of red berries in honor of the season. He kept his eyes open for a cantina or tienda where he might purchase food, perhaps inquire after this mythical sawmill of Spicer's, but he could see no such place. The mud brick buildings all looked the same. A few upper facades bore lettering in faded black paint, none of which he could decipher. He rode slowly on. Ahead, just past the square, a stone water tank stood beneath a dusty tree. He steered toward that, a place at least to linger for a while in the shade, wait for the siesta hour to end—if it ever did. The possibility occurred to him that the entire population of Batuc had migrated to the vast cemetery back at the edge of town. He looked around. At the moment there was not a living soul in sight—man, woman or child. Not even a village dog. A ghost pueblo beneath its towering white dome, like a mushroom absorbing the nutrients from a rotting timber. He wondered if it might be one of Spicer's macabre jokes, to direct him to such a place. An object lesson, Spicer would say, smiling, leaning back in his desk chair, leaving him to figure it out.

He was within twenty yards of the tank before he saw the rurales. The brightness of the sun overhead had rendered them all but invisible in the deep shadows beneath the tree. There was a full company of them, perhaps two dozen men sitting or slouching about, most with their sombreros off and smoking or dozing with their backs against the walls. They were wearing earth-colored uniforms with bandoliers of ammunition strung across their chests, and armed with sabers, revolvers and Winchester rifles. None of them looked up at him. As he passed the adjacent alley, he saw their horses. They were

hemmed up inside a mud corral and being attended to by a group of boys. Delaney thought briefly of turning off that way himself, as if he had some purpose in mind, but he knew he could not make it work. Instead, he made a show of riding slowly on, touching his hat and nodding in the general direction of the lounging men. He passed the stone tank and the tree and the shadow of the tree and had almost reached the last mud building on the square when one of the rurales rose and came walking out into the street. He looked aggrieved at having been required to do so. He had his sombrero tipped forward over his eyes and walked pigeon-toed, as if his feet were sore.

—Step down, he said, nodding toward the piece of ground beside him.

—Buenas tardes, Delaney said.

When the soldier reached up to take the horse by its cheekstrap, Delaney saw the faded chevron on his sleeve. He also noticed that the man, though deeply sunburned, was fair-complected and blue-eyed and that the hair beneath his sombrero was reddish blond.

—The captain will want a word with you, the man said in English.

—All right.

Delaney dismounted and waited as a boy came forward to take his horse. Once the boy had led it away, the capo motioned Delaney toward an unmarked adobe building fronted by a low stoop and shaded by a overhang atop two crooked cedar posts. As he drew closer, he could hear the steady rise and fall of talking from within, and through the open door he could see men inside sitting at a wooden table eating and drinking. When he reached the steps, the capo placed a hand on his shoulder, indicating that he should sit. Delaney looked again into the cantina. Just inside the door an upright, military-looking man was seated with his sombrero hung over the back of his chair. He was square jawed with close-cropped hair and a heavy, drooping mustache. Perhaps

feeling Delaney's eyes upon him, he turned, looking incuriously in his direction, then returned his attention to the men sitting with him.

2. Don Emilio

The capo's name was Briggs, and he hailed from Tell City, Indiana. He lowered himself onto the stoop beside Delaney, and they conversed for a time, moving back and forth from Spanish to English.

—The captain will like that you speak Mex so good, Briggs said.

—The captain?

—Him, Briggs said, nodding over his shoulder toward the doorway. Captain Kosterlitzky. Don Emilio. The captain is a man of many parts. Speaks five languages. Is a Russian Cossack by birth. Jumped ship from a Russian naval cruiser in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. Nineteen years old. Made his way from there to Guaymas. Took him five months. Got to Guaymas, liked the lay of the land, knowed the Mexes would give him a job chasing bandidos and Apach, so he joined the Mexican army as a private. Now look at him—

Briggs nodded again toward the cantina door.

—captain in the Guardia Nacional. Him and President Díaz are thick as thieves. Águila de Sonora, they call him. The Eagle of Sonora. I tell you what, you aint ever seen a Rooskie Cossack with his blood up and waving his sword around, you don't know what you been missing.

—That who these fellows are? National guard?

—You betcha. Well, they got a fancier name. Gendamería fiscal nationale, something like that. But people go with rurales. Close enough.

—How'd you wind up hooking up with them?

Briggs grinned.

—Same as you. They come across me knocking around Bavispe, that general area. No visible means of support,

captain said. But he liked that I could ride, had a good outfit, could speak the lingo some. He give me the same choice you better hope he gives you.

—What choice would that be? Delaney said.

—Join up or get shot trying to escape. That's the way of things down here. They got a saying. Se escapó pero solo un poco. 'He got away but only a little way.' Your other option is to accept Don Emilio's generous offer to be of service to the Sonoran state.

—Meaning what?

—Meaning the man's got a good sense of humor.

Delaney peered back through the open door. The captain was sitting sideways at the table, drinking from a tin coffee cup. He was wearing tall cavalry-style boots that buckled just below the knee. Again he turned his head to glance briefly in Delaney's direction.

—Gathering up a first impression, Briggs said. Captain is good at that. He says he can tell everything he needs to know about a man within the first two minutes of meeting him. Same with horses. Man's a shrewd judge of character. Prides himself on it.

—I've heard similar said of other men, Delaney said. Generally speaking of themselves. You ever known him to miss?

—Nope. Nor to admit it either one.

Briggs leaned back against the porch post and produced a tobacco plug and a clasp knife. He opened the knife and sliced off the end of the plug and slid it off the knife blade into his mouth. Delaney was watching the troops scattered along the street—hard, competent-looking, well-armed men.

—Where you boys headed?

Briggs shrugged.

—Hither and yon. Wherever duty calls. Still chasing Apache, what's left of them. Crook thinned them out some back in April, took a load of gandules back with him to San Carlos.

—Gandules?

Briggs took a moment to think.

—That's what the boys call them. Don't know if there's a good English word. 'Good for nothings,' I guess is close enough. 'Nere-do-wells.' 'Shirkers.' The ones who can't quite settle down and be satisfied with all those free blankets and hoes and pickaxes Uncle Sam is passing out. Rather be out raising hell.

Again Briggs grinned.

—Remind you of anyone you know?

—Like who?

—Oh, I don't know. Layabout-type fellows, drifters. Anyway, you got to hand it to Crook. Going after the Apache up in the sierras with only forty bluecoats and two hundred Apache scouts? That took some stones. You have any idea how much trouble two hundred Apache bucks can be? Friend or foe, it don't make no difference to them. Take that business at Cibecue Creek back in '81 when the scouts mutinied and killed a bunch of soldier boys. No, passing the peace pipe might be Crook's way but the captain, he's got other ideas. You get these skylarkers who can't keep their mind on their business, you give them one chance and then you just help ease them along to the happy hunting ground. Can't have them helling back and forth across the border keeping decent folk up nights.

They sat waiting. Briggs leaned around the post to spit. Most of the other rurales had found spots to stretch out in the shade with their sombreros over their eyes. From inside Delaney could hear the clatter of cutlery and again the smell of food came out to him. Something fried. It was two days since he had eaten. Beside him Briggs stirred and sat upright.

—The captain will see you now.

The interior of the cantina was dark with a wood plank bar along one side and some bulls' heads mounted on the wall. A burlap mural depicting a woman with a tall comb in her hair and a veil of flowers. Briggs led Delaney up to the table where the captain was seated. There were six or seven other men

there, both uniformed and civilian, eating, drinking and smoking. Briggs stood beside him. The men were conversing in Spanish, with one of them—a bespectacled, sleek-headed man—doing most of the talking. After a time the captain turned and looked up at him.

—You understand what they are saying?

—Si, Delaney said. Ellos estan discutiendo la iglesia.

—He speaks it good, Briggs said. I was talking to him outside. He says his name is Johnson. Riding a big Texas-looking roan. Winchester '73, plus what you see on him.

The captain was smoking a cigar and using a squat, three-legged molcajete for his ashes. He leaned forward to place his cigar inside its basalt lip.

—Johnson, he said. A very common name, is it not?

—I suppose, Delaney said. If it's the one you're given, it's the one you got.

Kosterlitzky pulled the little tripod vessel toward him and picked up the cigar and inspected the ash.

—A most philosophical way of looking at it, he said. And what brings you to Sonora, Mr. Johnson, if I may ask?

—I'm in line for a job. Engineering at a sawmill hereabouts. I rode down from Tucson, in the Arizona Territory.

Kosterlitzky lifted his eyebrows.

—Tucson? That is a very long ride. And you say it is something about a sawmill job?

—Yes. Do you know of a sawmill hereabouts?

Kosterlitzky shrugged.

—Sawmills? Of course. They are plentiful in this district. You perhaps noticed the great pine and oak forests as you came riding through them.

—Yes.

—Tell me, what exactly is it that a sawmill engineer does?

—Looks after the machinery, the belts and saws and such. Fills orders. Draws up the schedule. Makes sure everything runs smooth.

—I see. And is this not something a Mexican might be qualified to do? Just as there must be sawmill jobs closer to home for a North American, nearer Tucson in the Arizona Territory?

—I don't know. I was told about this one and rode down to see about it.

—Ah well, Kosterlitzky said. You have had a long journey. Perhaps you are hungry. Please sit.

Briggs pulled up a chair from another table and Delaney sat. The men were eating from a large tin tray holding small fish—bream or perch, they looked like—fried whole. Delaney tried not to look at the platter but could not help himself. Kosterlitzky leaned forward and pulled the plate in his direction.

—Go ahead. There is plenty. Help yourself.

—No thanks, Delaney said. Maybe later.

Kosterlitzky smiled.

—Later? There will be no later, not with the group you see here before you. There will only be the now. These fish are excellent. They come from that stream you passed just north of town, the one with the gravel playa. You saw the two boys fishing downstream when you crossed at the ford?

—No.

—Well, you must at least have seen their horse. They leave him at the ford as a warning to the unwary not to muddy up the water while they are fishing downstream.

—I saw a horse, untied, just standing there.

—And yet you proceeded thoughtlessly on, doubtless spoiling their fishing.

Delaney noticed now how the others at the table had grown silent and were following this conversation with some interest. He didn't know how much English they had, so there must have been something in the tone of Kosterlitzky's voice. To him it seemed quiet, patient, matter of fact. Perhaps there was something else.

—How was I to know what it meant?

—Exactly my point. Perhaps you speak a little Spanish to go with your English. But this place—Sonora—is its own world. As you are certainly aware, we lie at a great distance from Mexico City. Two thousand kilometers. In the capital they still think of us as a remote province, much as your own government in Washington must regard the distant territory of Arizona. And in this they are not mistaken. I have been here since I was nineteen. As soon as I saw Sonora I knew I would stay, that it would become my home. Perhaps because it is frontier, do you know what I mean? That is all it has ever been, for 350 years now. Let us hope it remains so forever. I would not wish to live anyplace else except upon a frontier. Although born in Russia, I am Mexican now. This is my native land.

He paused, perhaps expecting some response, but Delaney could think of none.

—I believe it, he finally said. I hear they call you the Eagle of Sonora.

Kosterlitzky's brow contracted in an expression that suggested both puzzlement and annoyance.

—And where did you hear such a thing, if I may ask?

Delaney let his eyes wander across the room in search of Briggs, but without success.

—I forget, he said.

—No matter, Kosterlitzky said, hiking himself more upright in his chair. Fire and sword are but slow engines of destruction when compared to the loose lips of the babbler, the chatterbox, the magpie. Such prattle has no place in the life of a military man. But let me ask you this. I entered Sonora at Guaymas. Where did you cross the border?

—It was just south of Bisbee. I forget the name of the place.

—That would be the pueblo of Naco, Kosterlitzky said. And you saw the boundary marker in the desert when you crossed, no? Tell me, what did you feel?

—Nothing in particular. It was just a pile of rocks.

—Nothing? And yet you are embarking on a journey of some 400 kilometers in search of a job. So perhaps it was hope that you were feeling.

—Maybe so.

—Of course there are other possibilities. Relief, desperation. A hunger for adventure.

—Like I said, I wasn't feeling nothing in particular.

Kosterlitzky leaned back to send a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

—For some men departing their native land, even temporarily, is a matter of grave consequence, you know. An occasion for reflection. You will recall that when Odysseus is returned to his native Ithaca he throws himself face downward and kisses the good green earth. Now not much of Greece is green—I've been there, I've seen it—but it was green to him. Do you see what I mean?

—I suppose.

—He had to leave because he was a soldier off to war. Other men have other reasons. But in your case I suppose it was only necessary travel, required to seek out your sawmill job.

—That's right.

—In which case I suppose you are right—the border is only a pile of rocks. They are arbitrary, after all—lines drawn upon the earth by men, not God. So as you crossed into Sonora perhaps you were thinking it seemed no different from the place you had left, the Arizona Territory. One can certainly understand that. I have seen the Arizona Territory, been there many times. Sheriff Bob Paul in Tucson is my good friend. Perhaps you know him?

—No, I don't think so.

—No? But you said that you rode here from Tucson. How is it possible you come from Tucson and do not know Sheriff Bob Paul? Don Roberto is a man of great substance, many talents. We meet at the border from time to time as a matter of professional courtesy to exchange information of mutual interest and benefit.

—I didn't say I hadn't heard of him, just that I don't know him.

—Ah, a pity. But surely you must be familiar with Sheriff Bob Paul's current dealings with the noted outlaw Joseph Casey, at present incarcerated in the Pima County jail. Peloncillo Joe I believe is his nom de guerre. In this country it would undoubtedly give rise to many a corrido. How the outlaw Peloncillo Joe escaped from jail and killed Don Roberto's friend Holbrook and how when the outlaw Casey was recaptured the citizens of Tucson descended upon the cárcel seeking to hang him on the spot. And how Don Roberto first had a water hose turned upon them and then mounted a desk in the cárcel with his double-barreled shotgun, advising them to return to their homes. It sounds like the sort of thing he would do. He seems to have some aversion to the summary execution of justice in such cases as this. A wholly arbitrary distinction, it seems to me. Romantic, even. What do you think?

—Hanging is hanging, I suppose.

—Ah, Kosterlitzky said, pushing back from the table. My point exactly.

He turned a little in his chair and crossed his legs again. His cigar had gone out, and he produced an ornate brass tinder lighter from his coat pocket and unscrewed the cap, struck a spark in it and re-lit the ash. He saw Delaney looking at it.

—Tools of the trade, he said. Try lighting your cigar with a wood splinter when those easterlies are blowing down off the sierras. One stands a far better chance of igniting his moustache.

Across the table the last of the fried fish had disappeared. A woman came out from the rear of the place and removed the tray.

—Yes, Kosterlitzky said, sending up another series of smoke rings. For you crossing that border meant only passing a pile of rocks. But this is my home. To me this is terrestrial paradise—a temperate climate, all the bounties of nature, open

space to move as one chooses. A man can make a life for himself here. Of course, these are the same things that attract other sorts of men as well—vagrants, fugitives from justice, renegades both red and white. Persons who would abuse or jeopardize the freedoms of others. This is our mission, that of my men and myself: to protect the honest people who wish to make a life here. Who wish to form a society. Tell me, Mr. Johnson, does living in such a place appeal to you?

—That's why I'm here.

—Ah yes, to become a sawmill engineer you said.

—That's right.

—And what if duty should call? To preserve such a paradise requires service. There are no sword-bearing cherubim here such as God placed around the original garden. There are only men like ourselves—those you see here and those outside in the street. It requires that individuals temporarily set aside their private interests for the good and safety of all. Such is a requirement of every just society. Cincinnatus leaves his plow in the field, says farewell to his wife and goes off to lead the Romans against the barbarians. So has it always been. An admirable thing, do you not think so?

—I suppose.

—Good, Kosterlitzky said, leaning forward to stub out his cigar. We are in agreement, then.

From a position off to his left Delaney saw Briggs take a step into his line of sight. He was grinning.

—We are?

—But of course. We agree that you recognize your obligation to be of service to any legitimate enterprise to which you have joined yourself and from which you expect to reap the benefits. An obligation that began accruing once you passed that pile of rocks near the pueblo of Naco.

—What do you mean? Are you talking about being of service to the state of Sonora?

—I am. It is an option that places one in a camp squarely opposite that of men like Peloncillo Joe, your countryman currently being held in the Pima County jail and awaiting his

date with the hangman. That is, provided the good citizens of Tucson do not get their hands on him first.

They fed him at a corner table: frijoles and tortillas and the red chili peppers the Sonorans called chiltepins. Briggs came to sit with him.

—Missed you a while ago, Delaney said. When your captain was mulling over that remark about him being known as the Eagle of Sonora.

—Had to step out back for a minute, Briggs said. Looks like you come through all right, though. Captain didn't cut you loose but he didn't have them hold you pending further inquiry neither. Put you in the lockup in a place like this, there generally aint no need for further inquiring.

—He can do that?

—As I been trying to tell you.

—So where are we going? Delaney said, his mouth full.

—Back the way you came, Briggs said. First up to Oposura, what they're calling Moctezuma now. Then swing west toward Baviácora. Then home to Hermosillo. That's where we're headquartered. Check in on a few ranchos along the way. Got some reports of Apache out that way. Sound all right to you?

Delaney wiped the plate with the last of his tortilla and folded it into his cheek and drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

—Don't see what choice I got.

—Man's always got a choice. Some better than others.

—You fought Apache a lot?

—Some. Not that many of them left but those that are make right lively company. Mexes and Apaches hate each other. You have no idea. Goes back hundreds of years. Wasn't long ago that this whole part of the country was pretty much emptied out. Oposura, Fronteras, Bavispe. Damn near every presidio over in Chihuahua. Apache would set aside a

couple of different times every year that they called la luna del mexicano, 'the moon of the Mexican.' Harvest time. Come down out of the mountains and take what they needed. Guns and ammunition. Cattle. Horses. Women and children. Same as you or me would walk into the town store back home.

—How long you been doing this?

—Coming up on three years now. It's all right. Eat regular. These boys know how to fight. And track. They can track a pocket mouse across a lava patch. I mention this in case you might have any ideas of slipping away some dark night.

They sat for a time longer. The men outside were stirring, looking to their saddles and outfits and weapons. The village boys had begun bringing up their horses, the boys grave in their duties, matching each of the two dozen riders with his mount. When Briggs rose from the table Delaney did as well and followed him out into the street.

His horse had been fed and watered and, by the looks of it, currycombed as well. Seeing Delaney approach, the animal lifted its head two or three times.

—I know, I know, Delaney said. I see you. You're thinking, where's this been the last two weeks? Little spritz of perfume, you'd look like you just stepped out of an El Paso barbershop.

As he walked around the animal checking the saddle and tightening the girth, Kosterlitzky emerged from the cantina and came to stand alongside. He pulled his gloves out of his belt and slapped them against his thigh and put them on.

—A fine-looking animal, he said. What is his name?

Delaney looked at him from over the seat of the saddle.

—His name?

—Yes. Your horse. He has a name, does he not?

—His name is Buddy. I used to have one named Sam. I lost him upcountry in the Utah Territory a few years back.

—Lost him? You mean he wandered away?

—No. I mean he was stolen from me by Indians. Paiutes, I believe they were.

—Ah, he said. Indians and their horses—an old, old story of mutual affinity. What were the Indians before the Spanish brought horses among them? Miserable earth-bound beggars. And now? Now they are warriors—some say the finest light cavalry force the world has ever known, although I wouldn't advise saying that to a Cossack. What do you think?

—I don't know. You're the one that's been fighting them.

—Quite so, Kosterlitzky said. I will admit that their connection with their animals is quite remarkable. Almost mystical. In a way you might almost say that it was the horse that created the Indian—though our clergical friends would have it otherwise, maintaining that bringing the one true God among them was the decisive factor. Of course, this is a moot point with regard to the Apache, who of all Indians has been the one most resistant to Christian teachings. We were just discussing this matter in the cantina today when you arrived. Horse or God, what do you think?

—Couldn't tell you, Delaney said. Not something I've spent any time thinking on.

Kosterlitzky reached out to run his gloved hand along the horse's flank, then came alongside to look closely into its face.

—You do not mind if I touch your animal, I hope. I have heard that some of your countrymen have strong feelings upon this subject.

—If he can stand it I reckon I can.

—Buddy, Kosterlitzky said. A good name for a horse. A strong name. A name that implies kinship and affection. I am glad you are not one of these barbarous fellows who thinks a horse does not need a name.

—No.

—He must be given a name to signify that he is an equal, which he most assuredly is.

—Yes.

—Cavalrymen, you know, are sometimes superstitious, knowing that the death of the horse under him—perhaps many horses—is an inevitable consequence of his chosen trade. This

was very true among the Cossack friends of my father. The cavalryman does not name his horse, thinking that he does not wish it to become too close a comrade. He cannot afford to be a sentimentalist. Instead, he prefers to think of it as interchangeable with many other horses, like any other piece of equipment, a lance, a saber, a sidearm. Which is not the case.

—No.

—It is a remarkable story, that of the horse. Of course, it was the horse that made possible the Spanish conquest of this entire country, Cortés having at his disposal only 500 men. But he did have sixteen horses, and these were Iberian horses, the same ones with which they had chased the Moors out of Spain. Imagine the Indians' terror when Cortés lined up thirteen of them for that first cavalry charge on the plains of Cintla—beasts the Indians had never seen before, ridden by warriors with steel armor and weapons. They thought horse and rider a single beast, something supernatural. After the conquest one of the first things the Spanish did was establish a breeding program here, and it was a man of Sonora who did most to advance this work. His name was Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit priest. As he moved north Christianizing the Indians, he placed horses among each group he converted.

He smiled.

—For their part the Apaches declined the Faith, but they had no problem accepting the horses. Quite an irony of history to have empowered your enemy—created him, really—by attempting to civilize him, do you not think so?

—I reckon, Delaney said. Things don't always work out the way you intend.

—No, Kosterlitzky said. Quite correct. They do not.

A boy came up leading Kosterlitzky's horse by its headstall. It was a sorrel mare of the breed the cowboys referred to as a Spanish mustang. It was thickly muscled and rugged in appearance and looked as if it might fare well in close quarters and over broken ground. He had known men who

favored them as cow horses, good to rope off of and said to possess good cow sense.

—Ah, here she comes now, one of Padre Kino's great-great granddaughters.

Kosterlitzky stepped back to allow the boy to bring the horse alongside Delaney's.

—A fine looking animal, Delaney said. What is her name?

Kosterlitzky took the reins from the boy and lifted them over the horse's head and swung himself up into the saddle.

—Please accept my apologies, he said. There are some things about which I am superstitious as well. Perhaps once we know each other better.

3. Sandoval

They rode out north on the road toward Moctezuma, a vanguard of five or six up ahead and an equal number behind. They rode casually but not inattentively, with good discipline and no foolishness in the ranks. Retracing his route from just the day before, now joined to a collective such as this, had a strange effect upon him. He felt somehow both liberated and constrained. Invisible, yet in full view. As for Buddy, he seemed invigorated by this change of circumstance and had to have some of the unruliness ridden out of him.

Delaney's conversation with Kosterlitzky about horses had him thinking again of his time in Utah. The coincidence of the two place names—both Montezumas—probably had something to do with it. He was remembering standing on the stockade wall of the fort on the San Juan River that the Mormons had for some reason named after an Aztec cacique. He had arrived at that place without rifle, sidearm or horse. The missing horse's name had been Sam, stolen away from him in the mountains during a snowstorm. Now he was remembering standing on the stockade wall looking out at the Paiute warriors, some twenty of them, milling about below.

The Mormon girl Ella standing in the doorway beneath him, her arms across her breasts, her skin so pale, almost transparent. The Paiutes were demanding flour and beef, of which the Mormons had none to spare. They had been raiding among the Navajo to the south. Their chief had delivered a long harangue, interrupted only when a second warrior rode forward from the ranks behind him and lifted his rifle menacingly in the direction of the barricade. The warrior was wearing a bone breastplate and bead vambraces, and he was riding Sam. The horse had been painted with a long yellow stripe along his flank, and there were feathers braided into his tail. Seeing the animal, Delaney had stepped out from behind the rampart and called down, 'That's my horse you're riding, you son of a bitch.' The warrior had looked up at him, his hair falling loose down his back and his teeth glinting and the horse pivoting beneath him. 'Give me your rifle,' Delaney had said to the Mormon standing beside him, a man named Harris. Instead, Harris had laid a hand on his arm. 'Them's all our horses,' he had said. 'Or was at one time. Recognize most of them myself. That's just the way of things out here. Maybe we can get some of them back someday, though I doubt it. And I will tell you something, once they been with the Paiutes they aint never the same horse. Don't ask me why.'

He did not doubt that Brother Harris was right. Men talked of women like that, in terms of transformation and betrayal. He did not know what to make of his time among the Mormons, although Kosterlitzky seemed right when he spoke of the significance of borders crossed. It had not seemed that way at the time. There had been a seamlessness about it then, an inevitability. Perhaps if he could read what was written on the rocks—the ones he was now passing again here in this new country, the messaging appearing in reverse order from the previous day like paging through a book backwards. He had seen similar inscriptions on the wintry face of Utah. It seemed possible that they were meant for him. Who else?

He was watching the rocks when a rider came ranging up from the rear of the column and fell into place beside him. When he looked over, he saw that it was the sleek-headed, bespectacled man he had seen back in the cantina. He noticed now that the man was wearing a grubby linen collar beneath his tunic and a silver crucifix on a leather thong at his throat.

—Cómo vas? the man said.

—Esta bien.

—I am guessing that you did not expect to pass this way again. Or at least not so soon.

—You are guessing that?

—Of course. Nor to find yourself a de facto member of the celebrated Guardia Rural.

Delaney leaned over the far side of his horse to spit.

—Celebrated?

—Of course, the man said. Over hills and vales, from Arizona to Sinaloa, from Chihuahua to the sea. I can sing it all for you if you like.

—No thanks, Delaney said. I'll take your word for it.

They rode for a time in silence.

—You enjoy fighting Apaches? Delaney said. Seems a strange occupation for a priest. You are a priest, right?

—I am. Very observant of you.

—Not so difficult, given your rig. That neck cloth and cross.

—My name is Sandoval, and you will perhaps discover that fighting the Apache is something priests in this country have been doing for a very long time.

—I thought your job was to save their souls, not kill them.

—That would require powers beyond those of poor servants of God such as myself. Satan has been among these people for hundreds of years, long before the Spanish arrived, and they have thrived in his service. I hesitate to even call them men. They are like those locusts—we call them cigarras—whose empty shells one finds on fence posts and paving stones. Do you know the ones I mean? Whatever may once

have been inside is long since flown. Is gone. All that can be done now is sweep away the shells.

—Too bad there are no Opata around to show them the error of their ways.

Beside him Delaney saw Sandoval swivel on his horse, a broad smile upon his face.

—Ah, he said. A student of history. A philosopher, even. How refreshing.

—Not me, Delaney said. All I know is what I hear.

—No, no. I have a feeling about these things. One can sense when he is in the presence of an intelligent man. It can be a rarity out here.

They rode on, the powdery dust from the horsemen ahead of them lingering in the air. Delaney raised the kerchief from around his neck to cover his mouth and nose. He recognized the country they were passing through, the ochre cliffs and dry washes and wayside boulders marked with depictions of mazes and mouse men and splayed human hands. These things were fresh in his memory, but the truth was that country seemed to stay with him. Remained transposed in some inner place. He thought that it was the same with horses. He had heard of cases where horses, having somehow become separated from their riders, trailed back fifty, sixty miles to their stable.

—This land can seem a strange and haunted one, Sandoval said. Especially for those who come here for the first time. Or when seen through the eyes of a man of heightened sensibility such as yourself. He discerns things in his surroundings that others do not. For others it is all just part of the general scenery. It goes in one eye and out the other. They might as well be beasts of the field, looking on without the capacity for awe. Or in this case like cazadores, like the mountain lion, intent only upon tracking their prey.

Delaney turned to look at him.

—That how you see these fellows you're riding with?

Sandoval smiled.

—Yes and no. It is meant as a compliment. Useful for their work. But I can see that you are different, looking about the place with such attention, such apparent wonder. Wait—

He pointed to a heap of stone just off the road ahead.

—Here is something that I think might interest you.

It was a stone cairn into which a blue-painted piece of tin had been inserted vertically like a fin. Beside it a cross buried crookedly inside a circle of whitewashed stones and wreathed with a purple coronet. Other crosses off at a distance.

—They are called descansos—resting places. Each marks a site where a Christian soul departed this earthly life. As you will see, they are quite plentiful along this particular road. Of course, death is found on every road. The two go hand in hand. What sin is more ancient? The aborigine lurking among the rocks, the highwayman lying in wait for the unsuspecting traveler. Today it is the Apache, but a thousand years ago it was the men who painted these stones. A hatred of other men was bred into them from birth. The very sight of an unknown person was enough to provoke violence. As for me, I never pass this way without thinking of the famous road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Only twenty-five kilometers from the heights of Jerusalem down to the luxurious oasis of Jericho where Herod the Great had his winter palace. But a notoriously dangerous road, steep and treacherous with narrow defiles and blind turns—ideal for robbers. Saint Jerome claimed that the sandstone was colored red from all the blood spilled there. You may recall that it was also the road where the Good Samaritan stopped to render aid to a poor man robbed and left for dead.

Sandoval paused, and Delaney looked to see if he was through. In his experience it was an unlucky thing to be approached by a stranger so full of talk. Mashers, he had heard them called. They took men's minds off their business. Inspired carelessness. Lulled them into bad decisions. Caused losses at cards. Spooked herds. Were bad luck.

—And of course that was the same road along which Our Savior passed on his last entrance into Jerusalem.

Sandoval lifted a hand in the general direction of the surrounding buttes.

—I find it useful to hold such thoughts in mind as we travel along this way. For one never knows the hour of his deliverance.

Delaney took another hard look in the man's direction, trying to discourage him, trying to ward him off, avoid the evil eye.

—Ah, how I long to see the Holy Land one day, Sandoval said. I have been told that of all places it resembles Mexico most. It somehow makes sense that it would. Which brings us back to the descansos—look here is another one. Some of them, as you can see, are quite elaborate, resembling little chapels almost. And you will also find that graveyards such as the one you saw coming into Batuc are by no means the exception in this country. In fact, they are the most important feature of every village. More important than the plaza or the mercado or even the chapel. It is an interesting subject, the special place that death holds for the Mexicans. Almost like a love affair. It is a strangely death-centered world. There is even a celebration in its honor, the Día de los Muertos. Two days, actually—one for the niños, one for the grownups. It was last month. You just missed it.

—Padre, he said. You will pardon me but I don't have the slightest rabbit-ass idea what you are talking about.

—Oh I think you do, Sandoval said. You are just being modest. After all, it was you who brought up the Opata. It is obvious that you are a serious man. A man who takes an interest in such things. You rode past the cemetery in Batuc. You heard us speaking of the Iglesia de San Francisco Javier when you came into the cantina.

—I saw the cemetery, Delaney said. I saw the church. Were those Opatas holding up the man and the baby in that carving over the door?

It took Sandoval a moment but then he laughed.

—No, I am afraid not. The man would be Saint Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies, and the child in his arms our Holy Savior as a babe. And the figures surrounding and supporting them are the seven archangels—Miguel, Gabriel, Raphael—I forget the others—all part of the marvelous gift of revelation brought to the Opata.

—So no Opata in the carving. But they were the ones who did all the digging and cutting and hauling of that stone.

—Of course. And not just the digging and cutting and hauling but the carving as well. The Opata created that beautiful keystone, local stonemasons over a hundred years ago. True artists. The vision was brought to them by the Jesuits but it was the Opata who extracted it from the stone. Ignorant persons say there is no God in Mexico. This is because they do not know how to find Him or to recognize Him when they do. To such persons Mexico is a primitive, benighted place. But here God shows Himself as He is and in the manner that men require for proper worship. As testimony and proof I give you the Iglesia de San Francisco Javier in Batuc—built by thousands of hands over hundreds of years, even to the extinction of a race. A collective descanso, a mausoleum as it were, of which all these others are miniatures—look, there is another. On the other hand, I was in your Arizona town of Tombstone a year or two ago when the captain was conferring with Sheriff Bob Paul. They had just finished building a nice church there, an Episcopal one, I believe it was. One of the schismatics—it is difficult to keep them all straight. It was undoubtedly the labor of several months, involving half a dozen paid workers—carpenters, masons, painters. I went inside and sat. It is a little bandbox of a place. Adobe block, blank walls, gabled roof. There was a piano. It reminded me of a quaint English cottage. There were pillows which people could place beneath their knees if they wished to kneel. I cannot believe that God would ever visit such a place, can you?

Delaney kicked up his horse.

—We probably need to be getting on, he said. I can't imagine your captain approving of this kind of lollygagging. I seem to remember him saying something back in the cantina about the loose lips of the babbler, the chatterbox, the magpie. Words to that effect.

Sandoval smiled again, more broadly this time.

—Of course you are right, he said. It is a failing of mine, a distinct failing, this expansiveness. Our business here is to deliver God's judgment upon what is left of these miserable, devil-worshipping savages. I apologize for the sermonizing, if that is what it seemed. But as every good sermon must conclude with a homily, allow me to finish in kind. Back in the fall we happened upon a hacienda the Apache had just left. The stables were still smoking, inside which were the roasted remains of the animals which the Apache had not seen fit to carry off. Everything from inside the hacienda had been dragged out into the yard: wrecked furniture, broken dishes, smoldering featherbeds. All of it considered bad medicine, you know, things from a world they will never understand. There were also eight or ten bodies scattered about—all naked, all burned, all mutilated. It was difficult to tell whether some of them were men or women, the Apaches having relieved them of their hair as well as their unmentionables. We walked up into the main house and there was the hacendado himself, the only one left alive, sitting with his feet propped up on his desk, reading a cookbook. When he looked up and saw us he showed no more surprise than if it had been King Philip of Spain walking through that door.

Sandoval was smiling.

—And so there you have it. Like any good homily it is an exhortation to go out into the world, the words simple and direct as befits an audience of men such as you see here gathered. And so if—

Sandoval seemed ready to say more, but another horseman was riding back down the line toward them.

4. Caravanserai

It was Briggs. He turned his horse to join theirs and looked at Sandoval, and Sandoval slowed and let himself fall back toward the rear of the column.

—Man can talk some, Delaney said. Seems maybe a few grains short of a full load.

—Come with me, Briggs said. Captain got a job for us.

—What kind of job?

—Not a question you get to ask.

Briggs spurred his horse forward and Delaney followed. Half a mile up the way they turned off the track toward the west where they came upon two of the column's outriders halted in the shade of a live oak tree. The men were slouched in their saddles with their sombreros tipped back, drinking from their canteens.

—Miguel and Carlito here cut some Apache sign a ways back. Looks like a party of them might have ventured off into this canyon there. Got some mules with them. Captain wants us to go in and have a look.

Delaney raised himself from his saddle to look at the place. It was an arroyo leading off farther west, its mouth perhaps fifty yards wide. Just beyond this entrance the passage took a turn so that only a rock cliff was visible.

—Have a look? Delaney said. Where's the captain going to be?

—At the other end, Briggs said. Miguel and Carlito will stay here, see that nobody drops in behind us. We'll go slow, make sure they can hear us coming. They'll probably be butchering out those mules, won't be in the mood for a fight.

Briggs swung his horse around and Delaney followed. Inside the barranca the ground fell away, creating a winding defile no more than a hundred yards wide. The earth underfoot was red and sandy, the air still, everything silent except for the sounds of their horses. He experienced a sense of reality contracting, delivering itself up in ever smaller

increments of sight and sound. He had known the feeling before, but this seemed different. Perhaps it was the alien country he had entered. Perhaps was the priest's depiction of the Mexican road, blood-soaked and murderous, like the road that Jesus had walked. But the voice in his ear was neither the priest's nor his own. It was someone else's. It was a familiar voice, but it took him a moment to place it. It was the voice of his brother John, eight years his elder and now ten years in his past and as dead to him as anything was ever likely to be. John who as a soldier of fourteen had fought along the sunken road at Antietam one September afternoon in 1862—the Bloody Lane he always called it. Another silent, anonymous place like this one, perhaps awaiting its history to be written. It was an odd sensation, the sudden re-surfacing of something so long dead. He took it as a word of warning, coming from whatever place that John, living or dead, now occupied. He reached behind him and slid the Winchester from its boot and set it upright on his thigh. Their horses were now moving at the slowest of walks. Just ahead of him Briggs kept leaning down from his saddle to examine the ground. Delaney let himself fall back a little. He kept his eyes on the heights, examining each fissure and shadow, knowing that he would never see anyone who wished to conceal himself there. Not until the first shots were fired and perhaps not even then. The arroyo bent again, rose a bit and flattened, and suddenly Briggs lowered himself in his saddle and kicked his horse forward.

—Here we go, he called back over his shoulder.

Delaney followed, cocking his rifle one-handed as they went. They made one final turning, the dirt churning up and the canyon still opening before them, before Briggs brought his horse skidding to a stop. Delaney was so close that it was all he could do to keep from piling into him. He hauled up sharply, with his horse rearing and pirouetting beneath him. The cloud of dust they had kicked up overtook them then, and they stood wrapped inside it for several moments before he was able to make out what lay before them. Then he saw what it was. It was a circus wagon, four-wheeled, horseless and

unattended, standing against the far canyon wall. Its spokes were gilded, and it was painted red and green with lettering on the side in a sun-faded script. It seemed something unreal, set down like an exhibit on the canyon floor. Or the detritus of some past chubasco, redistributing the things of the upper world with a jocular randomness. Then he saw that the wagon was not actually unattended. Two men were sitting on the cart's tailgate, frozen in twinned attitudes of mute incomprehension. One of the figures was white, the other black. The white man was dressed in a dusty frock coat of the sort Delaney associated with undertakers. For some reason the Spanish word rose to mind unbidden: el enterrador, the in-earther. For a moment the facing pairs remained frozen in place, the horsemen with their rifles cocked and their horses sitting back on their haunches and the two seated men, one light and one black, like a photograph and its negative, unmoving on the transom. Then the impresario—if that is what he was—slid down from the wagon bed and came walking toward them, his arms spread wide like the proprietor of some remote desert caravanserai.

As the man approached through the screen of dust, Delaney suddenly recognized him. Although he had never seen him before, he knew who he was. Without even looking at the words painted on the wagon's side, he knew that his name was Marchbains, and that his black companion was Benjamin. When he did look, it was as if his thinking had painted the words there, at some distant unrecoverable time and now come to him along the same neural pathway that produced Brother John. 'DR. ELIHU MARCHBAINS' UNIVERSAL CURES AND ELIXIRS,' the sign said, and in smaller letters 'FAITH HEALER AND MIRACLE WORKER.'

—False alarm, Briggs said.

The two men sat their horses allowing the scene to resolve itself further. There was a dark seepage against the far canyon wall where the wagon's two mules had been taken out of the traces to drink. They too were standing with their heads

turned, looking at the source of the recent disturbance. The man in the dusty coat, still smiling, arrived before Briggs and stood squinting up at him.

—Buenas tardes, he said. I wonder if either of you gentlemen might speak English?

Briggs turned to spit out over the lee side of his horse.

—We both do, he said.

—What a fortunate development, then, Marchbains said. And I see by your uniform that you are a representative of the brave local gendarmerie as well. Doubly fortunate.

—What all you doing out here?

—Well, I am afraid that we seem to be lost. Benjamin here—

He turned to nod in the black man's direction.

—my boy Benjamin was driving while I was resting back in my quarters, and I am afraid he must have taken a wrong turn. Although since we found you here—or, I suppose, more accurately, you found us—perhaps it was just as providence intended. Even as a man of science, I can appreciate the working of higher powers.

—I wouldn't overcount on providence out here, Briggs said. You're lucky it wasn't a party of Chiricahua bucks come riding down that draw. I believe they might of taken a liking to that fancy suit, divvied it up among themselves, butchered out your mules for food and roasted them over the kindling from that there circus wagon. Maybe stake you and your boy over the coals for a little extra entertainment.

—Perhaps, Marchbains said. But in my experience the savages are highly superstitious. When they see a colorful wagon such as this, dispensing a palliative medicine, they are inclined to be respectful, allow us to proceed on our way. They hold their own medicine men in high esteem, I collect.

—Their medicine men been powwowing with the devil since Jesus walked. They esteem that.

—Well, no doubt, no doubt, Marchbains said, pulling the lapels of his jacket straight. In any event, I am happy that it was you that found us.

He leaned over to look past Briggs' horse.

—And you, sir, he said. Might you perchance be American as well? Permit me to introduce myself. Elihu Marchbains, Doctor of Medicine.

Delaney's horse was still skittish and backing some, and he took some moments to calm him and bring him forward again. He turned to Briggs.

—What now?

—We wait for the captain. He'll be along.

And so he was. It was only another minute before Kosterlitzky and the rest of the column emerged from the far end of the arroyo. He rode slowly past the wagon, looking it over.

—False alarm, Briggs said.

—So I see.

Delaney sat watching Kosterlitzky. Some of the men behind him were smiling.

—Not Apache, perhaps, Kosterlitzky said. But certainly another scourge upon the landscape. Men engaged in an enterprise designed to deceive and defraud our local Mexican citizenry of their hard-earned pesos. Preying upon their credulity. And countrymen of yours, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Johnson. So we are presented with an opportunity to see how justice is meted out here on the frontier.

He leaned forward to address the man in the frock coat.

—Dr. Marchbains, I presume?

The man moved away from Briggs' horse and came to stand beside Kosterlitzky's, once again straightening the lapels of his coat.

—I am. I am indeed, sir. Dr. Elihu Marchbains, at your service.

—A man of medicine you say? A doctor? And what medical credentials do you possess, if I may ask?

—Why of course, sir. I am a diplomate of the Eclectic Medical College of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with extensive training in the vital humors, materia medica and the healthy

regulation of bodily systems. What nature teaches us, sir, is that night air, sedentary habits, anger, wet feet, bad air, violent emotion, irregular bowels and extremes of heat and cold are the source of every ailment. The product I provide addresses these imbalances. It is a tonic guaranteed to set the vital forces aright. Allow me to present you and your men with complimentary bottles.

He made a flicking motion at the Negro, who reached into the wagon bed and brought forward two bottles. He handed them to Marchbains, who stood holding one up in each hand. Kosterlitzy sat his horse, watching him.

—And you have a license to practice medicine in Mexico, señor?

Marchbains had been smiling but now the smile began to fade.

—A license? In Mexico? Why, no sir. I did not imagine such a thing was required. As I explained, I am a diplomate of the Eclectic Medical College of Philadelphia, a legally chartered and highly respected medical institution, and entitled to all perquisites and privileges associated therewith. Naturally, my assumption was that this credential would be recognized in our sister republic of Mexico. I crossed over from Bisbee, Arizona Territory, into Sonora with no reservations at all on that account.

Kosterlitzy turned toward Delaney.

—Do you see what I mean? First there is the assumption that since this is Mexico we require no licensing of our doctors. There is ignorance of the fact that, as in many other Latin American countries, Mexico has been requiring licenses for physicians for some sixty years now, since the earliest days of the republic. This requirement extends also to pharmacists, midwives, phlebotomists and dentists. In Mexico City alone there are currently over five hundred licensed doctors. Of course, out here on the frontier one encounters more primitive forms of medical practice. Curanderos who claim the healing touch and dispense God with their roots and herbs. Brujos—witches, wizards and shapeshifters—who descend into the

underworld of the Aztec gods and practice the black arts. They were here when the Spanish arrived three centuries ago.

—So I told 'um, captain, Briggs said. Apach medicine men been powwowing with the devil since Jesus walked.

Kosterlitzky looked mildly over in his direction.

—Thank you, corporal. Anything else you wish to add?

—No sir. I guess not.

—Very well. Then I may suppose that my presence here is not entirely nugatory.

—No sir, Briggs said. Not nugatory at all.

Kosterlitzky turned back to Marchbains.

—And lastly there are the itinerant herbalists who concoct tonics, nostrums and potions and go about the countryside peddling them among the ignorant, credulous and unwise. Out here these are called merolicos. I believe that your English word is quack—

—Wait, Marchbains said.

—who are perhaps the most unsavory of the three, since the curandero and the brujo may be assumed to be sincere in their practices rather than out and out frauds.

During the course of these remarks Marchbains' countenance had remade itself several times.

—And what, may I ask, are the ingredients of this magic elixir of yours? Kosterlitzky said, gesturing toward the signage on the wagon.

Marchbains' features now recomposed themselves in an expression suggesting both sagacity and cunning.

—A highly proprietary formula, sir, as I am sure you will understand. But suffice to say a combination of vegetable compounds, tonic herbs and lithia water—a proven hermetic formula dating back hundreds of years. The patent has been registered with—

—Here, Kosterlitzky said. Hand me that bottle. Señor Johnson here has volunteered to give it a try.

Marchbains handed up the bottle, and Kosterlitzy passed it over to Delaney, who held it up and read out loud from the label.

—'Dr. Marchbains' Fabulous Emulsion. Good for curing all diseases of the blood, liver, stomach, kidneys, bowels et cetera. It purifies the blood, cleanses and invigorates the system.'

Delaney looked down at Marchbains.

—What about curing the halt and the lame? I don't see nothing about that.

Again Marchbains' face registered a moment of uncertainty.

—I beg your pardon?

—The halt and the lame. I would have thought that'd be covered in a cure-all.

—Why no, sir. Surely such a claim would be exhorbitant. We physicians are bound by a strict code of ethics, you know, sworn to the sacred oath of our profession as handed down from immortal Hippocrates himself—

He paused, raising a forefinger toward the heavens.

—Primum non nocere.

He turned back to Kosterlitzky.

—Which is to say, loosely translated, 'First, do no harm.'

If he expected any further response from Kosterlitzky, he was disappointed. The captain sat leaning forward, his wrists crossed on the pommel of his saddle. His horse kept turning its head, its eyes rolling a little, uneasy to find this person standing at its off side. Marchbains almost reached out to touch the animal but thought better of it. Instead, he lowered his head, fixing his eyes on the captain's buckled boottops and backed away a little. Once he arrived in the shadow of Delaney and his horse, he looked up again, using his hand to shield his eyes from the sun.

—You look familiar, sir. Is it possible that you and I have met on some prior occasion? I have traveled extensively throughout all thirty-eight of the United States and all nine of her territories.

—Nope, Delaney said.

Delaney raised the bottle and looked at Kosterlitzky.

—You want me to drink this?

—But of course. Your countryman, a graduate of a distinguished medical college in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, claims that it will set your vital forces aright. That seems a beneficial thing.

Delaney unplugged the cork from the bottle and took a long swallow. It tasted of horehound and of something floral he could not identify, like verbena or lavender, with a potent, syrupy finish. He drove the stopper back in place with the heel of his hand and tossed it down toward Marchbains.

—How was it? Kosterlitzky said.

—About what you'd expect. Got a little kick to it about like a shot of Old Overholt. Ladies back home would knock back a few drams of stuff like this before setting out on their temperance marches.

—Just so, Kosterlitzky said. So I think we may reasonably conclude that the good Dr. Marchbains here is a common fraud and huckster, selling a crude and addictive narcotic under the guise of a miracle cure. Such activity seems little different from that of a thief in the night, both designed to separate hardworking, honest folk from their money. And then, judging by his sign, there is the blasphemous promise of faith healing. Why, even good Father Sandoval here would not go so far. Of course, one might argue that if these simple country folk believe it will help them, it might. That is roughly the way things work in Father Sandoval's business as well, as I understand it.

Hearing his name mentioned, Sandoval nudged his horse forward, raising a hand in a casual gesture of benediction.

—I can see no purpose in conflating my calling with the activities of a mountebank and a shill. As this is a civil matter, let us keep it such. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Yet recall too the remainder of that text, often neglected, that reads, 'and unto God the things that are God's.'

As a military man Captain Kosterlitzky has his duty to perform. However, there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

—Pah, Kosterlitzky said. A sure way to bring any conversation to a swift conclusion. Intone a line or two from the bard, and it is like the tolling of some distant bell.

He turned to Delaney.

—Well, what do you propose we do with this man who stands here before you? This parasite who preys upon the society we are sworn to defend. What say you?

—Do what you want, Delaney said. He's nothing to me. Not unless he's got some secret ingredient in that bottle that he forgot to tell me about—strychnine, nightshade, something along those lines.

—Wait, Marchbains said.

—No, Kosterlitzky said., lifting his hand. We have heard testimony enough. It is time for judgment to be rendered. Señor Johnson has spoken, and his word is final. His standard of jurisprudence requires only that your actions bring down no harm upon him personally. Like Pontius Pilate he would wash his hands clean of responsibility in this matter. Of course, like Pontius Pilate, in this gesture he is deceiving himself. Having released this individual back into society, he bears responsibility for every subsequent action that may result, whether known to him or not. Imagine a poor woman who spends her last pesos on a bottle of—

Kosterlitzy swiveled around to read the signage on the wagon.

—Dr. Marchbains' Fabulous Emulsion to cure her dying child instead of seeking out a legitimate doctor. Those consequences now rest not only with the perpetrator of the fraud but with the judge, who is his co-conspirator.

—Wait, Marchbains said.

—No, no more, Kosterlitzky said, lifting a hand from the pommel of his saddle. You are free to go about your business. Spread whatever mischief you wish among the general public,

just so long as none of it finds its way back to Señor Johnson's doorstep.

Marchbains stood before them for another moment, then turned and started back toward the wagon.

—Come along, Benjamin, he said, gesturing for the Negro. Bring up those mules.

By that time Kosterlitzky had already turned his horse back up the canyon, and his men were falling in behind him. Briggs had started out in the other direction, presumably to fetch in the rear guard. Delaney watched Marchbains raise the transom of the carreta and start making his way around to the wagon box. He walked his horse over and stopped.

—You still have your looking box?

Marchbains peered up at him.

—What was that? he said.

—Your looking box. The box with the peephole. Your diorama. I think I might like to take a look inside.

An expression appeared on Marchbains' face similar to the one Delaney had observed earlier, a look compounded of shrewdness and guile, a knowing dark fellow feeling—and something else, a hint of mockery perhaps.

—I was certain that we had met previously, Marchbains said. I have slogged this wretched conveyance through every mining camp, tent city and shanty town in every state and territory, and I knew that we must have met. A fellow like you is bound to turn up somewhere. But I am sorry to disappoint you. I can offer nothing along those lines. I am only a poor medico now. My operation used to involve considerably more pomp and circumstance. Now it is limited to compounding poor simples such as the one you have just imbibed.

—So no more making whole herds of cattle disappear. No shooting burning orbs out of the palms of your hands. No more capturing cowboys inside those glass plates.

Marchbains was eyeing him warily. He slowly shook his head.

—No, no. No more of that, I am afraid.

He nodded back over his shoulder toward his cart.

—My current circumstances stand exactly as you see them here.

—Is it because the cowboy trade was played out?

—I suppose so, Marchbains said slowly. That was prime clientele. But, believe me, I miss the good old days.

Now he turned to look toward Benjamin, who had collected the mules and was bringing them up from the seep.

—Benjamin, he called out. Look who we have here.

He nodded back in Delaney's direction.

—A former customer. From the good old days.

—No, Delaney said. Not me.

Hearing these words, Benjamin, grinning broadly, began to affect an exaggerated limp. He came hobbling up to the wagon muttering to himself in a singsong voice. The words were too indistinct for Delaney to make out but he knew their import. It was an old field song from his imaginary days of slavery. A portrait that called up in an instant an entire scenario of timeless suffering—poor, maimed Benjamin, his two mules in tow, making his weary way. But the day of his deliverance was at hand. A miracle such as was visited upon the cripple who lingered thirty-eight years beside the pool at Bethesda waiting to drink from its healing waters. Today his redeemer was come. The promise of it was already in his eyes as he came hobbling forward. Once he reached the wagon and began the work of backing the mules into the traces, however, his entire manner shifted. His apparent affliction fell from him as did his song of suffering. Instead, he began to heap abuse first upon one animal and then the other.

—At least you must still be doing the laying on of hands with Benjamin here. You still got 'faith healing' written on your wagon.

—No, I am afraid not. For some reason my current clientele, despite their remarkable ignorance and superstition, seems little interested in such demonstrations. Until very recently, of course, their Popish masters enjoyed burning

heretics and witches at the stake. As diversions go, it is difficult to top that.

Behind him Delaney heard the shuffling of a horse, and when he turned he saw that it was Briggs. He drew up a few feet away, and a moment later the other two scouts appeared some distance behind.

—Hey doc, Briggs called out. I believe that I will take you up on that offer of miracle tonic. I been feeling a little bit peaked lately. Tell you the truth, my bowels aint never been right since I come into this country.

Marchbains had moved around to help Benjamin with the mules.

—Of course, he said without looking up. But perhaps you may wish to confer with your friend here first. I believe that he is awaiting the results of the draught he just took. The effects can be quite profound, I do assure you. The powers contained within the innocent root, herb and flower never cease to amaze. Some men are never quite the same, even after a single dose. Of course, as your captain so wisely observed, one must first believe in the cure for the cure to be efficacious. That is where the faith comes in.

—Sounds good to me, doc, Briggs said. I got the constitution of a horse. Won't faze me.

—Very well, Marchbains said.

He reached into the wagon bed and produced two bottles and, like a circus juggler, tossed them in quick succession up in his direction. Briggs caught one in each hand and put them in his saddlebag.

—Tell you the truth, doc, Briggs said. If this tonic gets me plugged up, I'll give you a testimonial that'll have customers beating a path to your door. I never thought the drizzlin shits could become such a settled fact of life.

—Well, we shall hope for the best, Marchbains said. However, I must add by way of disclaimer that the maladies from which some men suffer are quite beyond the reach of any medicinal, however wonderfully concocted.

Behind them Miguel and Carlito had come walking their horses up. Briggs turned to look at them.

—You can say that again, doc. Now that you mention it, I got another small complaint—operating in the same general vicinity, only more fore than aft, if you catch my drift. I'm hoping your tonic might give me some relief there while it's at it. It's a little something me and the boys here seem to have picked up last time we were up in Nogales. Makes every piss a trial by fire, I can tell you that. You could fix them up with a couple bottles, I'm sure they'd be much obliged.

5. Gandules

They camped that night in a cedar copse outside the pueblo of Moctezuma, lately Oposura, ancient capital of Opatería. The guard had been set, and Delaney walked out to check on his horse, which was picketed with the others in a creekside pasture of hip-high grama and buffalo grass. He brought back his saddle and bedroll and dropped them on a spot away from the fire, then went back and filled a plate with beans from the pot and took three tortillas from the stack and went back to his saddle to eat. After a while he saw Briggs walking over with his plate. He squatted beside him and spooned some beans into a tortilla and began to eat.

—That business today with the medicine show, he said. You know that was the captain's way of seeing what kind of hand you are. You might be surprised how many men wouldn't be all that eager to go charging up a blind canyon to attack Apaches they couldn't see.

—Most of the ones with brains, I'd guess.

—Probably so. Still, I would hate for you to get the wrong idea about what we're up against out here. Road agents, dry-gulchers, rustlers, army deserters, ladrones of every stripe and persuasion, you name it. Hell, some of those Mexican gangs back up in the mountains can put two hundred men in the

field, like a little army. Smoking that devil weed, think they're bulletproof. But Apache do head the list.

—So I gather. Your priest, Padre Sandoval, took it upon himself to spend a considerable period today up inside my ear.

—So I noticed.

Now they could see Sandoval seated beside the fire, his back to them. He was partially turned, backlit by the fire, speaking to the man sitting beside him, his hands drawing something in the air. Briggs leaned to spit off into the darkness.

—He aint no priest. He just likes the get-up, the play-acting part of it. Got the idea out of some book probably. They say he's actually some sort of criollo, Cuban maybe, got connections back in Mexico City. Fashions himself some kind of king-hell Indian fighter. Like you said, maybe about half a bubble off plumb.

—So he doesn't do any of the regular things? Preaching and such?

—Not that I ever noticed. Not sure the boys would stand still for that. They take their religion pretty serious down here.

—Why does Kosterlitzky let him tag along?

Briggs glanced over at him, his head tilted above his plate.

—Captain Kosterlitzky, he said.

—Captain Kosterlitzky.

Briggs shrugged.

—Like I say, the man's got connections. How happy the captain is with the situation I couldn't tell you. This is a disciplined outfit. Why we've stayed alive this long.

Briggs scoured his plate clean with the last tortilla and lifted it into his mouth.

—You can bet the captain's got his reasons. Makes use of him as he does every man. Finds a place for him in the grand scheme of things. Just like he did me. Just like he will you. But don't be surprised to find yourself with that one in your ear again. What he does.

—All right, Delaney said.

—And be careful. He's an educated man. Not like us.

Delaney looked at him.

—What do you mean?

—What do I mean by 'educated'?

—Yes. Like going to school?

—I don't know. It aint just book-learning. Hell, I made it through sixth grade myself. It's something else with men like that. We both seen it. The ones that always got something they're trying to put over on you. The type that wind up running for office and owning newspapers and such.

He looked again toward the fire where Sandoval still sat, leaning over occasionally to listen, to speak. He watched as Sandoval turned toward them, holding up a brand to light his cigar, profiled a second or two by the fire. When Sandoval saw them looking his way, he tossed the stick back into the fire, rose and came walking over.

—This is where I get off, Briggs said, rising and striking his empty plate against his thigh. Going to give that miracle tonic of the doc's a try.

—Can't do you any harm. Aint that what the man said?

Sandoval stepped aside to let Briggs pass. He looked down at Delaney.

—Cómo estás?

—Muy bien.

—You should come and take advantage of the fire. It is growing chilly.

—I'm all right.

—Do you mind if I join you?

—Suit yourself.

Sandoval lowered himself into a sitting position, his legs crossed beneath him and leaning forward on his elbows.

—Well, that was quite something today, was it not? You never know what you're going to meet out here.

—I guess not.

—You are disappointed that it was not Apache, I suppose.

—Nope. My experience has been enough things find me without me going off looking for them.

—Quite so, Sandoval said. Could easily have been, though. After all, we are now in his ancestral heartland. They call themselves the Blue Mountain People, and these are his mountains.

—You don't say.

Sandoval sat looking at him, his face closed behind the reflection of the fire on his spectacles.

—Oh, but I do. You strike me as an inquisitive man. Perhaps it might be wise for you to learn more about your adversary. Especially since one of these days there will likely be Apache in that draw rather than a harmless medicine wagon.

—I thought we had covered all that. Ended with a homily about a hacendado reading a cookbook with his place burned down around his ears, as I recall.

Sandoval smiled.

—I cannot help but detect a note of mockery in your tone. No matter. I am not easily offended. Perhaps just a quick military briefing then?

—All right. I guess I can sit and listen at the same time.

—Good, Sandoval said. As you know, your General Crook was here with his force in April.

—He's not my general.

—No, of course not, Sandoval said. I meant no offense.

—None taken.

—His force consisted of forty regular cavalry troopers and two hundred Apache scouts recruited off the San Carlos reservation. A most unusual fighting force.

—So I heard. Especially after that business at Cibecue Creek back in '81 when the scouts mutinied and killed a bunch of soldier boys.

Sandoval cocked his head.

—Precisely. I see that you have kept abreast of developments. Though I suppose that since you were in

Arizona at the time the incident must have been much bandied about.

—Bandied about?

—In the newspapers. Spoken of in saloons.

Delaney shrugged.

—I like to keep my ears open.

—Crook's venture into Mexico was a remarkable military venture. Putting those two hundred scouts out in the field ahead of his little column. Those scouts weren't mounted, you know. He cast them out in front of him like a pack of hounds, tracking the gandules up and down those mountain passes and arroyos. Even afoot an Apache can easily cover forty miles in a day.

—You don't say. Why didn't they have their horses?

—They were dismounted because General Crook, quite sensibly, did not wish to put a party of two hundred mounted Apache in the field. Also they track better on foot. Can read every stone, every blade of grass. Eyes like hawks. Can smell camp smoke at a dozen miles. They only need horses to raid.

—So, looking back on it, your Father Tonto might think twice about bringing 'em horses in the first place.

Sandoval was looking at him a little more steadily now.

—You are referring, I expect, to Padre Kino. Eusebio Francisco Kino, of the blessed Society of Jesus. A great man.

—And is that your outfit, the Society of Jesus?

—No, I am what is known as a lay priest. I wear the collar and follow the calling but am part of no official order.

—But not a gandule, I hope. Some kind of renegade. A troublemaker.

—No.

—And so we have these two hundred Apache scouts afoot. What then?

—From any rational perspective, Crook's operation was folly. Its genius lay in utilizing the Apache against themselves, like a poison to head a poison. It is all the more remarkable when one considers that those gandules they were tracking were their own kinsmen, blood relations, family members

even. That is something to remember about the Apache. His one loyalty is to himself and the making of his own reputation.

—Like a good many white men I have known.

Sandoval sat back, his hands flat on the ground. He smiled.

—As I believe I have mentioned before, señor, you make for a most interesting conversationalist. Every thrust seems met with a counter thrust. Block and parry, you know, like a prize fighter. And see, now you have diverted me from my intended course. Thinking of those San Carlos Apache as coursing hounds has put me in mind of a story I read as a boy. I hadn't thought of it in years. I was raised in Havana, you know. We had a home just off the Paseo del Prado. I used to go up onto the walls of the forteleza and wander among the cannon. I was only twelve when my father enrolled me in the Real y Literaria Universidad de la Habana. Founded by the Dominicans but a secular and literary institution as well.

—I heard that you were an educated man.

—From your new friend Briggs no doubt. Probably he holds it against me.

—You'd have to ask him.

—In any event, I was only twelve, and those first stories you come upon in books stay with you forever. They become part of who you are. My teacher that year though a priest was a worldly man. He had us reading the Roman author Ovid. Do you know him?

—Nope.

—The story I am remembering concerned a young man named Actaeon, a Theban. Like his counterpart the great Achilles, he was educated by Chiron, the wisest and justest of the centaurs—half man half horse, you know. He met his downfall quite unexpectedly. One day while hunting on Mount Cithaeron he happened upon the goddess Artemis bathing in a pool. I suppose he might have turned away immediately, but what human could be expected to do so? After all, this was Artemis, one of creation's most ravishing beauties.

Unfortunately, she caught him in the act. Perhaps she felt that in seeing her naked he had attained some ascendancy over her. Put her at a disadvantage that would be displeasing to a goddess. At any rate, as punishment she changed him into a stag, and he was run down and torn to pieces by his own hounds—fifty in number, to be exact. The ingeniousness of the punishment struck me even as a twelve-year-old. Of course, it was only later that I arrived at the proper anagogical understanding: Actaeon rendered bestial by his lust, turned upon and eaten by the dog-like part of himself.

—You lost me there, padre. So the Apache on foot were like the hounds—

—Ah, Sandoval said. I can still remember the sun on that harbor, the smell of the flowers. I used to stand behind those cannon and pretend that French pirates were coming over the walls. I would climb the Espera Tower just as Doña Inés de Bobadilla, wife of Hernando de Soto, did every day hoping to catch sight of her husband's ship returning from La Florida, perhaps bearing news of the fabulous Fountain of Youth. Such were the pipe dreams of an earthly paradise that they concealed the real work to be done here, which was to free this continent from Satan's grasp.

Delaney, however, was back on Sandoval's mountain. Mount Seetheron. He could remember the scene. He could see the naked girl dropping her clothes in a heap next to his own as she stepped into the smoking pool. He could see her white body floating, buoyant, borne up as she pushed herself upward from the rocky limestone ledge beneath her. He could see her also from the moments just before, walking up the stony path toward him, her hand on the top button of her dress.

Across the way one of the rurales was putting the last of the firewood on the fire.

—Yes, Sandoval was saying, but the Crook expedition provides only an historical case in point. In mythical stories like Actaeon's there are other factors to consider. For one thing, Artemis was not just some innocent, blushing beauty.

She was also a great huntress in her own right, the goddess of the hunt in fact. So perhaps one would do well to remember that women are not quite the passive quarry they may seem. I often find this parable useful in instructing my flock on the temptations of the flesh.

—Yes, Delaney said. I was hearing earlier today about some of your flock's temptations up in Nogales.

—Sadly, yes.

—So what about Crook? You said that his plan worked.

—Yes. Quixotic as it was, it must be acknowledged a success. He apparently returned four or five hundred Apache to the reservation. Temporarily, at least. How many more might be left in these mountains is a matter of conjecture. They have fled deeper into the sierras, higher up. For them the harsher the terrain the better. It is what suits them best. Where they feel most at home.

—Their querencia, Delaney said.

Sandoval looked at him.

—What was that?

Delaney shrugged.

—Nothing. Just a Spanish word I picked up somewhere. I don't know what it means. You said heartland. That's probably close enough.

—In any case these mountains suit them. They are like the rattlesnake. They choose a land where they can be invisible. Apart from that, they have no use for it. They grow no crops, construct no buildings, contribute nothing to the advancement of civilization. They would be happy to remain in the Stone Age forever. And you make a mistake if you assume that you and they somehow share a common humanity. A serious mistake. Do not be deceived by the fact that they seem human in appearance—that is, bipeds capable of speech and of walking erect. Behind their eyes—what Satan has left there—is something you do not wish to see, believe me. Their worship of cruelty and blood and suffering. Think of these

three things as their unholy trinity and you will not be far wrong.

—I'll keep that in mind.

—So this cat-and-mouse game of escaping the reservation has been going on for years. Confinement only whets the Apache appetite for violence. And these ones we are pursuing are what you might call los matones, the hard cases. The worst of the worst. Chatto, Bonito, Juh. Named like the demon potentates, Moloch and Shemyazaz, Asmodeus, Kokabiel.

—You know them by name?

—Of course. Why not? When Juh broke that group off the reservation last April—seven hundred Chiricahua Apache—they left a trail of blood twenty miles wide back across the border, killing or carrying off every living thing they found in their path. Like a cloud of locusts or weevils, they were. Fifty people at least—Americans, Mexicans, men, women and children—bludgeoned, shot, skinned, roasted alive. Infants thrown into cactus patches to thrash themselves to death. Would have been worse if they had not been traveling with their own wives and children, so they didn't have time to linger. Of course, their own women are pretty handy with those butcher knives themselves. And they enjoy their work.

—And so this Juh, this is the one you're chasing?

—No, not Juh, thank God. He's dead. We heard he got drunk and fell off his horse into a ciénega and drowned. One of Satan's little jokes—you never know when the bill suddenly comes due, you know. The Apache have a fatal weakness for drink. It is a conspicuous sign of their fallen natures, this vile tizwin that they brew up and imbibe in massive amounts and lie up drunk for weeks at a time. When not out raiding it is all they wish to do, that and beat their wives, which is a sort of sport among them. The buck who is best at beating his wife is much admired by his fellows. Deny them these two activities—drinking tizwin and wife-beating—and they fly the reservation.

—Well. You seem to take a pretty dim view of them. I know plenty of folks back home who would say the same. I don't guess there's any point in wondering whether they might see themselves as the wronged party here, having been on this land first and all. Also I don't think I would much like living on a reservation. How about you?

Sandoval was already shaking his head before Delaney finished this remark.

—Ah, he said. Again your true sympathies are made clear. May I ask, are you from an Abolitionist or Quaker household? Freethinker? Mennonite, perhaps?

—Nope, Delaney said.

—No you are not, or no I may not ask?

—Both.

Sandoval shrugged.

—Down here we have seen our share of all these disaffected sects, all generally fleeing oppression in their own countries. Lately it has been the Mormons. They recently sent a delegation into Sonora in the hope of establishing colonies there, owing to your government's intolerance of their practice of plural marriage.

—The Mexican government has no problem with that?

—The interest of the Mexican government does not extend so far into the personal lives of its citizens as that of your country. We are of Mediterranean rather than Aryan stock, enjoying the pleasures of the senses—within reason, of course—rather than denying them. In any case, the Mormons also maintain a positive view of the Indian—this despite the fact that the Apache would happily begin robbing and killing them once they got the chance.

—The Mormons have had plenty of experience fighting Indians. The Apache will be nothing new to them.

Behind his spectacles Sandoval's eyes widened.

—Ah, so there is the clue. You have been among the Mormons.

—Seen some. That's all.

—An interesting people. I spoke with some members of their delegation in Mexico City. Their belief is that the red man and the white were once one race but that the red man—they call them the Lamanites—fell away from the true path, slaughtered their white brothers and sisters and laid claim to the Americas. It was for this reason that God caused the Europeans to return, seek redress and eventually bring their errant brothers back into the fold. An astonishing theory, of course, more like a fairy tale. But what can you say?

—Not much, Delaney said.

—Ah well. So now that Juh is gone we meet the latest Lamanite gandule in the person of this fellow Gerónimo. Not his birth name, mind you, which as for all Apache remains a secret. The name by which he is known among the Mexican peasants is that of good Saint Jerome, upon whom they call for succor whenever this red devil descends upon them. They say he is a clairvoyant. A man with a special genius for evil, even among the Apache.

—Sounds scary, Delaney said.

—It is. When you see those red devils painted up for war and dressed in the clothes of the people they have slain. But perhaps I am telling you nothing you did not already know. If you have spent some time in the Arizona Territory you will have seen the Apache for yourself.

—Mostly just mixed breeds hanging around saloons trying to cadge drinks. Sweeping up the place, hiring out as hostlers. The others aren't allowed off the reservations. Seem to have had most of the starch taken out of them.

—But if you know of Cibecue surely you heard of the McComas affair back in the spring. New Mexico Territory. It was in all the Mexico City newspapers.

—Maybe so. Apache raiding party from Mexico, wasn't it? Was that Gerónimo?

—No. That was Chatto. He and Bonito crossed over southwest of Tombstone raiding for guns and ammunition. Killed some miners and men in the charcoal camps—probably twenty-five or thirty in all—then circled east into New Mexico

and headed for home. On the way they came across a young couple, the McComases, having a picnic lunch under a shade tree with their six-year-old son Charlie.

—I remember hearing something about that.

—Señor McComas— Judge McComas, that is—had only been in the New Mexico Territory a short time, so perhaps he did not fully comprehend the nature of the country. He was living in Silver City, working as a lawyer for the mining companies. He saw no harm in taking his wife and son on a little excursion over to Lordsburg. What is the distance between those two points? No more than seventy kilometers—forty-five of your miles. They could make a leisurely trip of it, divide it over two days. Mrs. McComas—her given name was Juniata—had never taken in that part of New Mexico. Quite scenic with all its soaring peaks and broad vistas, especially for flatlanders from Iowa. Anyway, they would make a family outing of it, take little Charlie along.

—I suppose you have your reasons for telling me all this.

—I do. Because when it comes to truth a single example can defeat a hundred generalizations. That is why I spoke to you of that hacendado reading his cookbook. To my way of thinking the McComas story is of like kind. Like many persons emigrating from the eastern United States, Judge McComas had little idea of what sort of world he had entered.

—Excuse me, padre, but are you sure you've got the right man here? You do understand I been out here in this country a good while. I'm not some pilgrim.

Across from him Sandoval had removed his spectacles, raising them into the firelight and using a handkerchief to wipe the lenses clean.

—No, of course not. But if the only Apache you have known have been sweeping out bars and working as hostlers perhaps your understanding has been partial as well. Very partial, I might say. I mean no offense. It is just that a true knowledge of our adversary is essential to our mission here.

The Mexican lads riding with us have such an awareness. They are born with it, carry it in their blood. Goes back centuries.

—All right, he said. What about the McComases?

Sandoval hooked his spectacles behind his ears, the light from the fire glinting off the lenses.

—The McComases' journey begins on a Tuesday morning in March. This past March 27, 1883, to be exact. At John Graham's livery in Silver City Judge McComas rents a buckboard and team. They travel the first twenty-five kilometers—a mere seventeen miles—at a leisurely pace and stop for the night at a hostelry, the Mountain Home, operated by the Dennis family. The next morning after breakfast they are back on their way, riding out of the Burro Mountains and into the Animas Valley. It is a beautiful, mild spring morning. Around noon they decide to stop and spread a picnic lunch beneath a picturesque walnut tree. They can see Lordsburg in the distance.

—How do you know all this?

Sandoval tilted his head, looking at him.

—As you would say, I have made a study of it. Spoken to the principals, walked the ground. Didn't I mention that I was in Arizona last year? It was when I visited the little Episcopal church in Tombstone. Sheriff Bob Paul had sent word that he might have captured the notorious outlaw Procopio Bustamante. We knew this could not be true, however, not with Procopio wandering down here in the Sierra Mixteca boasting of his misdeeds against the hatred gringo. The man was a past master of the self-glorifying corrido, I can tell you. In the meantime I became interested in the McComas matter. I have a passion to go beyond popular accounts, especially those in the newspapers, which are forever trifling, false, self-serving. I wished to be able to uncover the truth for myself in so far as that was possible. It is a habit of mine. I believe that it is part of my calling to the Faith, to know the world as it truly is. I am not one of those head-in-the-clouds priests.

—You follow in the footsteps of your Padre Kino, then.

Sandoval shook his head.

—You flatter me, señor, but I know my limitations. Perhaps you know of Padre Kino, even unaware. Have you visited the San Xavier del Bac mission near Tucson, which he built in the year 1700?

—No, Delaney said.

—A truly great man, Sandoval said. Evangelist, explorer, cartographer. His sainthood is scandalously overdue.

—No doubt. So, Mr. and Mrs. McComas are sitting under the walnut tree with little Charlie eating their picnic lunch.

—Yes, Sandoval said. That's right. And along comes Chatto and his twenty-five bucks riding out of the northwest, completing their eight hundred kilometer—

—Don't tell me, five hundred mile—

Sandoval smiled.

—Correct. Their five-hundred-mile circuit up from Mexico. For them it has been an orgy of violence, a rapturous experience such as a Christian saint might feel in the presence of God. And now this. A storybook picture of a civilized white-eye family sitting out in the middle of nowhere with a picnic spread before them. So foolish, so guileless—so utterly un-Apache. And, of course, entirely random and unlucky, which for the Apache was the beauty of it. Chatto and his bucks slaked in blood and loaded down with plunder, and this young couple and their son picnicking under a walnut tree.

—I think you already covered that part.

—Yes. As for what happens next, one must be left to his own devices. He must imagine the three McComases looking up from their picnic to see this horde materializing from out of the west. Like a mirage off the salt flats but unfortunately all too real. It takes a while but there they are, their faces painted, in their buckskin and breechclouts and red war hats, unlimbering their weapons of war—rifles and tomahawks and war clubs—as they come. The Apache feel themselves the deliverers of a terrible, dark message. For a woman like Juniata

it is a picture too terrifying to have appeared even in her worst nightmares. As for little Charlie, he has no idea what to make of it. A circus troupe or entertainment of some sort? Only Judge Hamilton McComas recognizes it for what it is, and he has only a few seconds to consider the extent of his folly.

—Nobody else to blame, I guess.

—No. The entire fabric of his carefully constructed life unravels in seconds. No one sees what happens over the next fifteen minutes—no white person, that is. But the road to Lordsburg is a well-traveled one, and within an hour of Chatto's passing a witness arrives. A witness after the fact, as it were. It is a young man named Julius Caesar Brock. No writer of fiction could have chosen a more perfect name. He has been out shooting hawks. For a few seconds the scene beneath the walnut tree makes no sense, but then it does. He goes no closer but instead turns his horse, rides hard for Lordsburg and returns with a posse. By examining the ground they are able to form a reasonably accurate account of what has transpired. Judge McComas' body, stripped naked of course, is found beneath the walnut tree, riddled with bullets. The law papers he was carrying are found torn to shreds and left piled in a heap upon his back. This is the Apache way of saying that this man's medicine—whatever it was—was no good, had failed him. From examining the tracks the men are able to reconstruct the rest. Seeing what is riding down on them, Señor McComas hurries his family back into the buckboard and turns it back toward Thompson Canyon, the way they came. He realizes at once that they will never make it. So he leaps down from the wagon box, handing Juniata the reins and sending her and little Charlie on. Possibly there is time for some final exchange of word or look between them. Possibly not. Possibly there are only moments of fear and panic and recrimination. Then Judge McComas returns to that fateful walnut tree, sign and symbol of his destiny. He must give his family what time he can. It is not much. He has already been shot once. Blood is found in the boot and on the buckboard floor. He probably lasts only two or three minutes

beneath his tree. In all he is shot six times—twice in the right arm, once through each thigh and twice through the body. It is possible that the wounds are deliberately placed in order to inflict maximum suffering and to allow the victim to experience the piecemeal destruction of his body. It is the opposite of a quick and merciful or even efficient death.

Sandoval reached down and plucked up a handful of earth, sifted it between his fingers.

—As for Juniata, she makes it a few hundred meters in the buckboard before the Apache shoot one of her horses and she is forced to leap down with little Charlie. Now they are running for the canyon. What good she thinks this will do is unknown. It is too late to hide themselves. At any rate, she doesn't make it. The Apache ride her down and bludgeon her to death, a suitable death for a woman and avoiding the unnecessary expenditure of ammunition. Simple but deadly weapons, those Apache war clubs. Pick out a good, smooth river stone, wrap it inside a rawhide thong at the end of a flexible willow wand—works about like a medieval flail. A single blow crushes the skull. Juniata's body, also naked of course, is discovered by the posse about a hundred feet from the buckboard—a long way from Burlington, Iowa, where she grew up. Her shoes and stockings and corsets have been cut away and are found discarded in the brush. The remainder of her clothing has been carried off. The Apache value white clothing, especially women's. They give it to their wives or sometimes don certain articles themselves. As for poor Juniata's final moments of life, the North American newspapers will say that she was 'outraged,' that she 'suffered a fate worse than death.' In places where men gather the language will be coarser. They will say that, in traditional Apache fashion, every buck 'took his turn' upon Juniata McComas' white, defenseless body. The truth is, however, that Apache seldom rape white women. They find them ugly and the practice beneath them, as a white man might regard congress with an animal. They believe that the act will spoil

their medicine and bring them bad luck—that white women are a sort of she-devil, a succubus that will haunt their spirits. And so they simply prefer killing them, or turning them over to their wives, who enjoy the work. In any case, here the story ends—or at least this chapter of it. Chatto and his bucks—Naiche, Mangus, Bonito, Dutchy—ride triumphantly on toward the Animas Mountains, a route that will take them back across the border and eventually here, into the Blue Mountains, their home.

—Well. Some story.

—Yes. This is what I have been trying to explain. It is not simply the Apache we are fighting. It is evil incarnate. They are in the service of Satan.

—Did you say one of the Apache was named Bonito?

Sandoval turned his face up to look at him, the twin moons of his spectacles reflecting the firelight.

—Yes. You have heard of him?

—Maybe. I don't know. Name sounds familiar.

—Worst of the worst. Gerónimo's cousin on his mother's side. He was at Cibecue Creek and at the breakout from San Carlos with Juh last spring. Somewhere along the line his wife—one of them anyway—got killed. Her Indian name was Hermosa although while on the reservation she had also taken a white name, Maria Baker, I believe. Funny you should mention him. He's the one we think may have little Charlie.

Again, in a strange flash, although Delaney had never seen him, he saw him now as if Sandoval had conjured him up—a squat powerful man standing in the doorway of the old Spanish blockhouse pronouncing her name Mar-e-ha-bay-ker.

—What do you mean?

—Little Charlie McComas. You have been paying attention, yes? The child's body was not found with his parents. The thinking is that he must have been taken captive. The Apache have a propensity for that sort of thing—abducting Mexican or norteamericano children and raising them as their own. They are not so numerous that they can produce

offspring in sufficient quantity to replace those lost in raids and war. And so little Charlie is presumably still out here somewhere.

—And you think that this Bonito has him?

Sandoval shrugged.

—Quite possible. We are in contact with a Bedonkohe medicine woman, a curandera, who lives up in the Pajaritos north of here. She trades with the gandules—roots and herbs, that sort of thing. According to her, the Apache scooped up little Charlie and were squabbling over him when Bonito rode up, threw the child up onto the saddle behind him and carried him off.

—So, Delaney said. That's where things stand.

—Yes. Although our duties lie chiefly in protecting the Mexican people, if in the due course of things we should discover that Charlie McComas, age six, is still alive and can return him to the norteamericano authorities, so much the better. Meanwhile our chief goal is to find Bonito and Chatto and these other savages before they can go limping back into San Carlos and throw themselves once again upon the apparently inexhaustible mercy of General Crook. And if we do find them, we shall serve them out in the same manner they did the McComases and those dozens of others they butchered last spring on that trail of blood.

—Straightforward enough, I suppose. Eye for an eye.

—That is Don Emilio's way. He is like the Jehovah of the Old Testament bringing justice down upon the heads of the wicked, not meting out mercy to the unrepentant.

Across the way the campfire had burned very low, and men were drifting away to their bedrolls.

—Well, Delaney said, gathering himself up. Believe I'll call it a night.

Sandoval broke into a broad smile.

—Yes, no doubt you must be tired. You cannot complain about any lack of excitement on your first day on the job. Perhaps you begin to see how different a world Mexico is from

Arizona. What was it your General Sheridan said about Arizona?

—He's not my general.

—No, of course not. I believe he said that if he owned both Arizona and hell, he would live in hell and rent out the other place.

Sandoval began laughing soundlessly, rocking back and forth on his hams. He raised a hand.

—No offense.

—None taken. I heard it was Texas he was talking about. Or maybe Mexico.

—No, no, no, Sandoval said, waving his hand before him. Impossible. President Díaz himself has already coined the definitive aphorism for our country. It cannot be surpassed. 'Alas, poor Mexico,' he said. 'So far from God, so close to the United States.'

Again Sandoval surrendered to a bout of silent mirth, pressing his arms against his sides.

—Well, on that note, Delaney said.

—Yes, but—con permiso—I wonder if you might indulge me one moment more.

—That's what you said an hour ago.

—It is only a small thing. I ask out of a personal curiosity. It is about that business with the medicine wagon this morning. Why did the medicine-show man think he knew you?

—No idea, Delaney said. Never saw him before in my life.

—So he was mistaken?

—I reckon.

—I was taken by his name, Sandoval said. Elihu Marchbains. Do you suppose it could be real? Many men out here travel under false colors, you know. It is safe to assume that they have their reasons.

—How would I know?

—I was particularly struck by his given name. Elihu. Do you know that character from the Bible?

—No. But I have a feeling you're about to tell me.

—Yes, Sandoval said. One of Job's so-called comforters, the final one, but not like the others. The others assume that Job's sufferings are proof of his sinfulness, and he cannot convince them otherwise. But this Elihu is different. He says only that Job has spoken about the unjustness of his fate without wisdom or knowledge. He says that Job has no standing to speak. That by his questioning he has sought to bring God before the bar rather than himself. That he has been intent upon justifying his own actions rather than affirming the righteousness of God's.

—Lost me there again, padre.

—It simply means that we all have sinned and been less than the men we hoped to be. Job's true sin is pitting his own judgment against God's. Such pride can be forgiven but only if it is acknowledged and confessed.

—Good to know, Delaney said. We run up on that wagon master again, you'll have to explain all that to him. And now I believe I'll be turning in. I'm guessing this outfit is early risers. But now let me ask you something. That whole priest get-up, that's not for real is it?

Sandoval's face broke into another broad smile.

—Oh, it's real all right, he said. I have acquired a name of my own among the heathen. They call me El Búho Gris. Gray Owl. The Apaches are deathly afraid of owls, you know. They are considered very bad medicine. The first time they saw me riding into one of their rancherías with a live owl tied to my saddle bow, the place emptied in an instant. They know when they see me coming it is not General Crook with his blankets and beads and offerings of amnesty.

6. Mazocahui

The trail out of Moctezuma led southwesterly through a broken country bounded north and south by mountains. The column was widely spaced along this rocky, winding track but

he kept the riders ahead of him in view and was careful to keep pace. From time to time he caught a glimpse of flankers out on either side of them picking through the rockfall and gullies, the riders and their mounts disappearing into the shadows and then reappearing in another place. The sun rose above the horizon behind him, putting a welcome warmth onto his back. The mountains here were steeper, with flattened tops and thick vegetation at their bases and upon their cloven faces. There were no signs of human habitation that he could see. Mid-morning they passed a notch where a long ribbon of waterfall came spooling down from the upper heights. Unlikely as it seemed, those heights too were heavily forested, creating a world presumably self-contained and inviolate. Beneath the waterfall the cliff face had been worn away forming a declivity in the stone—a cave perhaps—with the cascade of water falling across its mouth. He was able to watch this for a long time, the water tumbling down in utter silence perhaps half a mile away, until the trail turned and descended again and the scene disappeared from view.

He never saw the Apaches nor knew from which direction they came. All he heard was the rattle of gunfire going off to his rear, and when he looked back he saw the two men behind him wheel and go galloping off down into a break to the northeast. As he turned his horse to follow, Briggs came surging up alongside. He had his Colt drawn and his hat hanging by its lanyard down his back. Their way took them down through a pine woodland undergrown with low scrub and agave, with many fallen trees. Delaney took his horse on a winding path through these obstacles, following on Briggs as closely as he could. The slope bottomed out onto a rocky expanse of prickly pear and Spanish bayonet, and when they reached this point Briggs lifted a hand directing him left as he drove off around the other side. Delaney circled the cactus patch, arriving at the foot of another steep, pine-covered slope. Here he stopped to listen. The grade above him was enclosed in deep shadow. He could hear nothing except the blowing of his horse, the scrabbling of its hooves on the loose scree.

There was no more gunfire. He considered calling out to Briggs but could see no point in doing so. Near the crest of the ridge there was a gap that seemed to offer a prospect onto the terrain beyond, and he had started up that way when he saw a man sitting his horse in among the trees. Delaney recognized the horse first, a grullo mustang, and then its rider, the rurale named Miguel who had been part of Briggs' rear guard. He was sitting slumped in the saddle in an attitude of apparent dejection, his arms straight down by his sides, disappointed perhaps to have the engagement broken off. Delaney walked his horse up the incline, sawing his way back and forth among the pines, but even as he drew closer Miguel did not turn to acknowledge him.

—Miguel, he called gently. Que pasa?

It was then that he noticed the blood on the horse's flanks and dripping from the stirrup onto the ground below, and when he came up alongside he saw the Apache war lance protruding from Miguel's side. The staff had broken off, and all that was visible now was a foot-long length of cane tipped with a forged-steel blade buried almost to the hilt. Delaney reached out to touch the man's shoulder, but he knew that he was dead. He saw too now that Miguel's horse was wounded, with a patch of dark blood low on its breast and more blood visible on its muzzle as it breathed. The animal started when Delaney touched it, causing Miguel's body to heel backwards, and he had to reach out to steady him in the saddle.

He was in this position with a hand on Miguel's shoulder when he looked back and saw Briggs coming up the slope toward them. Briggs rode slowly past Delaney without looking at him and dismounted and Delaney took away his hand and let the dead man slump down upon Briggs' shoulder. Briggs shifted the load and carried the man to the nearest tree and set him upright against it. For a few moments he remained kneeling before the body with his head down as if exhausted from the effort. Then he reached forward and wrenched out

the lance. What was left of the shaft was painted red and bore a feathered adornment or fetish at the base of the blade.

—Sotol cactus stalk, Briggs said, holding it up. Original was probably eight, nine foot long. Best weapon ever made for close quarters on horseback. Bastard broke it off, let Miguelito keep the business end of it.

Now, half turning, Briggs held the bloody metal blade aloft for Delaney to see.

—And tipped with a genu-wine forged-steel bayonet courtesy of the United States Army. Another one of Crook's brilliant ideas.

He spat on the thing and flung it off beneath the trees, then rose and came walking back toward his horse.

—What happened? Delaney said.

—Small party of Apache, no more than four or five. Don't know who it was, exactly. Rode right through us, cut the column in two. Killed another man besides Miguel here. Sons of bitches. Captain's blood will be up now. Not that it wasn't before.

He looked up toward the ridgeline above them.

—Apache don't take scalps or count coup like other Indians. For them the killing is enough. They like killing their enemies instead of just scaring or shaming them. Maybe knew some of these boys but most likely they didn't. Probably just saw a chance to put down a couple of us, and so they did. Apache never fights unless he's got a sure thing, a hundred per cent advantage. Not a blessed hero among 'em.

There was something strange in Briggs' voice, a huskiness, and when Delaney looked at him he saw that his eyes were wet.

—You want to shoot Miguel's horse or you want me to? Briggs said.

Delaney looked up at the animal. It was still standing as before, its legs slightly splayed and its head down as if asleep.

—I'll do it.

—All right. Then maybe you can help me get Miguel up across my saddle. There's a little pueblo up ahead here. We can borrow their graveyard.

He was looking down at Miguel. He shook his head.

—Aint nothing you can say, he said. Ya le tocaba. His number come up.

They buried Miguel Castillo in a pueblito called La Pastoria. Delaney counted the houses—five—and the graves in the cemetery, stopping at a hundred. The other man killed was named Ramos. Delaney tried remembering him from the cantina at Batuc or from their time on the road together, but he could not.

The following day they turned westward into the cordillera and in another day's time reached the village of Mazocahui, located on the eastern bank of the Río Sonora. Mazocahui was an Opata word meaning Sierra del Venado, Mountain of the Deer, and true to its name a cast-iron stove stood in the village square with the hindquarters of a whitetail deer protruding from its gate. There was a blue coffee pot on the stove, a cast iron kettle, brown pinole tortillas stacked on the eye. A wooden bedstead had been set out in the square with a saint's card pinned to the headboard and two children asleep on it. There were streamer clouds over the steep slopes of the mountains to the west, the peaks poking up through them like massive tent poles.

—We're in luck, Briggs said, riding back down the line. Fiesta. Nineth day of Las Posadas.

He nodded over at the sleeping children.

—Los niños is all wore out.

Delaney rode slowly through the town with the others, their number now reduced by two but this being a common occurrence among soldiers in any war, accepted by them as a matter of course. Ya le tocaba. As for him, he had seen a good many men die, in some instances men he had known fairly well, and Miguel Castillo had not been one of them. Still, the memory of holding the dead man upright in his saddle as Briggs rode up to them was one he knew would stay with him.

He would remember Miguel's blood on his own hand and upon the back of Briggs' tunic when he set Miguel down beneath the tree. Whether owing to these things—the two deaths or these past ten days on the road—entering the pueblo of Mazocahui had an unearthly feel. It seemed a celebration of which the riders were meant to be a part—prepared for them, even. The light itself was a miracle, making objects appear with such clarity as if seen for the first time and thus investing the surroundings with great mystery. In the square a bare-chested man was dancing with a deer's head tied atop his own. A serape'd child sat holding a pet calf about the neck. There were strings of red chiltepins, plates of honeycomb fritters sweetened with panoche, chili colorado, jars of bacanora, the local mountain mezcal. A paddle-cactus Christmas tree stuck through with flaming red fruit. Other things to which he could put no name but seeming all the more real for that. And all laid out, or so it seemed, for their delectation.

Yes, it was a strange, conjuring direction that things had taken, this realer than real. He had thought that being in Mexico would be different—the language, the food, the customs—but not this, this deepened elaboration of the material world. The same objects mostly present but seeming of differing weight and magnitude. The incidents of the previous ten days on the road passed through his mind one after the other like the pages of a book. The phantasm serpent, the aboriginal messaging on the rocks, his brother's voice of ten years ago speaking of the bloody lane, his arrival before a spectral medicine wagon from his past. It was too much like dreaming. He did not trust dreams, had few that he remembered and none that he lingered over. But these past nights he had been dreaming of Utah—of snow-covered vistas shrouded in anonymity, itself the dream of a dream. Now, sleeping in this high-desert mountain cold, he was returned there again, insistently it seemed, summoned to some esoteric purpose. It had been Christmas season then too in that Utah of long ago. He had spent two wintry weeks lost in the Elk

Mountains, in the turnings and twistings of that baroque and fearsome landscape. He remembered the sun setting, the great bowl of the sky aflame in orange and scarlet. Sheltering at night amidst the abandoned dwellings of a vanished race and leaving his own name among theirs. The four-year interval separating the then from the now seeming but a jumble of impulse and mumchance event, like some preposterous shivaree. Passing the stone boundary marker in the desert ten days ago had put things on a different course—all leading to the present moment, an annunciation of sorts, riding up upon an Opata village on Christmas Eve Day, 1883. Yet even in that uncertain interim there were intimations, like flashes of lightning in some dawnless pre-world. He remembered the woman he had seen bathing in the spring in Las Sierras de Mulas who had spoken of the firecat and her mountain querencia and whom he had told of following a llama down a mountain track in Utah, the animal black-tufted and amber-eyed. Like Sandoval's Actaeon he had been a young hunter dressed in animal skins and trained up by centaurs. And now the Sierra del Venado, the Mountain of the Deer. Elk, Mule, Deer in a mute semaphoring. The mountains standing before him in triplicate like paper mountains cut out by a child and yet a locale perhaps as meaningful and arcane as Judge McComas' walnut tree, final sign and symbol of his preordained journey.

They rode on through the little town. The people were glad to see them, always glad to see the brave rurales who were their protectors against the Apache. Of course they would provide a posada, a room at the inn. The little whitewashed church was the same as in every Mexican village. It had a Mexican flag draped above its entrance just beneath a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe, resplendent in cobalt and encircled by glowing fire. Groups of villagers were scattered here and there, dancing arm in arm, kicking their feet in unison. To the west of town the sky was now drawn down like a cowl upon the highest peak and against this backdrop, from some place just beyond the village, a firework went slowly ascending,

bursting at last with a dull report like a single handclap and sending down a confetti of sparks onto the rocks below.

7. Hermosillo

From Mazocahui they followed the course of the Río Sonora southward to Hermosillo, reaching the capital city in time for the first days of the new year. Delaney's fellow troopers were happy to be home after two months on patrol. They camped on a plain east of town to recruit themselves a little and the following morning rode in.

Hermosillo was a city of some eight or ten thousand inhabitants located in a wide valley surrounded by groves of orange, citron and lime trees. Irrigation for these orchards was provided by water drawn from the Rio Sonora by a network of stone acequias, which also supplied the dozens of fountains located throughout the city. These fountains and the little plazas surrounding them seemed the heart of the city. Women were gathered around the stone fonts with their bundles of wash, laughing together and keeping an eye on the children chasing about. The squares were bordered by rows of whitewashed adobe jacales with thatched roofs and hide doors, and along the avenidas there were grander houses built in the Spanish style with tiled roofs and barred gates and patios full of flowers. There were bakeries, farriers, a mercado, a farmacia, a public bath built above artesian wells. The streets were paved and lighted by lamps. Riding slowly along, Delaney found himself filled with wonder. It was a place unlike any other he had ever seen. He remembered the first time he had ever seen the word. It was printed at the top of a smudged sheet of newspaper in which his tortillas came wrapped that day in the piney woods on the road to Batuc. He remembered reading the announcement of a performance by Angela Peralta, El Ruiseñor Mexicano, the Mexican nightingale. The city's name, he had thought, meant something like 'Little Beautiful One'—one of those Spanish diminutives vanishing toward

invisibility. Sandoval had confirmed this. The closest he could come was 'Little Dandy.' Its former name had been Pitic, a Seri word meaning 'where the rivers meet,' but Sandoval had said that it had succumbed to the Mexican tendency to rename every place in keeping with the sentiments of the present moment. No one knew how these things were decided. One just awoke one day to find the place he was headed now under a different name. It was a quality indigenous to Mexico, he said. Like Moctezuma for Oposura, Delaney had said. One tribe of dead Indians for another. Sandoval had smiled. There are still a few Seris left, he said. Cannibals, he said, living on Tiburón Island in the Gulf of California. They live inside cactus houses and worship the pelican, the turtle, the sun and moon. You don't want to go there.

He spent the early morning hours walking around the Plaza Zaragoza. This was a wooded park of several hectares located in the center of the city. There were evergreens and palms and grass lawns. There were peacocks walking the grounds and roosting in the trees. On the east side of the plaza stood the Catedral de la Asunción. Opposite it, across the park, was a handsome building of quarried stone which he learned had recently been rebuilt under the auspices of Governor Rodriquez as the Instituto de Bellas Artes de Sonora. The entire complex was enclosed inside a triple palisade of trees, and six paved promenades crisscrossed the interior space, converging like the spokes of a wheel. At the center of the plaza was a kiosk and a bandstand and a pyramidical black stone on a pedestal behind a chain. He squatted and read the worn brass plate attached to the base: Meteorito de Pitic. A dead fireball, then, fallen upon the city in a previous incarnation. As a man who had spent many nights outdoors, he had always assumed that they must land somewhere.

It was a beautifully clear morning and even in January the sun was already bringing the promise of warmth. In the spaces beneath the trees vendors had laid out their wares: textiles,

leather goods, turquoise and silver jewelry, woven baskets, sombreros and serapes. He had no money to buy but he lingered among the various displays, looking. Seeing him standing there, an old woman rose from her charcoal fire and presented him with a gourd of steaming coffee. He accepted it, his protest that he could not pay waved off with a brief hand gesture as she turned away. He lifted the vessel in both hands and drank, the coffee sweetened and thickened with what he thought might be goat's milk. There were several of these beasts tethered with grass ropes in among the vendors. He drank again, feeling the warmth in his hands and then moving through him, into his inner core.

Kosterlitzky's rurales were billeted in a building adjacent to the Instituto de Bellas Artes. There was a school next door, and as he sat waiting in an outer room, Delaney watched uniformed Mexican children entering the building through a heavy wrought-iron gate. An older man in a white linen suit stood holding the gate ajar and gravely nodding the children through. The room in which Delaney was sitting was sunny and bare except for two cane-bottomed chairs standing side by side. A waiting room, truly named. Dust motes hung in the golden light. With the children now having passed into the school, it was perfectly quiet outside. A bell sounded in some distant quarter. After a few minutes an orderly appeared, opened an interior door and beckoned Delaney inside.

Kosterlitzky was sitting behind a desk having his boots polished by a Mexican boy of perhaps eight or nine. The desk was a ponderous thing—two cabinets topped with a thick oak slab—and piled high with papers. When Kosterlitzky looked up and saw him standing there, he motioned him toward a chair beside the window.

—You saw the children going into the school next door? Compulsory free education for every child in the state. Reading, writing, the elements of grammar, arithmetic, the decimal metric system, rudiments of geography and history, geometry, principles of morality, urbanity and gymnastics. Six

hundred students in all, both boys and girls, examinations every six months.

He glanced down at the Mexican boy at his feet.

—How this little rascal has escaped their clutches this fine morning is a mystery to me. Perhaps we should walk over and have a word with the superintendent, Señor Fuentes. You saw him at the gate? Señor Fuentes is a serious individual. He was formerly director of studies at the Spanish university in Salamanca before coming here.

Meanwhile, the Mexican boy was keeping his eyes assiduously downward, working two brushes simultaneously on opposite sides of the boots, and at the mention of Señor Fuentes' name buffing all the more enthusiastically. When he was done, he remained kneeling, his eyes cast downwards, silently awaiting his client's judgment. Kosterlitzky put both boots on the floor and leaned forward to look at them. Then he reached into his vest and extracted a coin and extended it between his first two fingers for the boy to take. Without raising his eyes the boy collected the coin and muttering an almost inaudible gracias was out the door and gone, his wooden box of polishes and rags tucked beneath his arm. Kosterlitzky sat for a moment watching the door through which the boy had passed.

—I cannot be too hard on the lad, he said. I remember how much I hated school when I was not much older than him, especially after my father transferred me to the Imperial Naval Academy in Moscow. All I had ever wanted was to become a cavalry officer—a Cossack like him, like my uncles, like my great-uncles. Then suddenly there I was in the naval service. All sea charts and plotting courses and trigonometry tables. I think I always suspected that my first voyage would be my last. In fact, I made it only half-way through. We were sailing around the world, St. Petersburg to Vladivostok by way of Cape Horn. I jumped ship with a friend in Venezuela, a place called Puerto Cabello. We hid in the upstairs of a cotton factor's, listening to the ship's whistle calling us back more and

more insistently, then watched until its stacks had dropped below the horizon. There I was, nineteen years old, marooned as truly as Robinson Crusoe in a strange and unknown land. Previously I do not think I could have found Venezuela on a map. I am certain I could not have found Sonora. But there I was, in wretched Puerto Cabello, with the rest of my life staring me in the face.

He waved a hand through the air as if to brush these words aside.

—Excuse me for going on so. One's vanity leads one to assume that his life's story is as interesting to others as it is to himself.

—It's all right, Delaney said. Maybe you think I can learn something from it.

Kosterlitzky smiled.

—So you suspect that I might have some ulterior motive in mind? That I am some sort of pedagogue like Señor Fuentes next door?

—I don't know. Are you?

Kosterlitzy sighed, leaning forward in his chair. There were several thick stacks of papers on his desk turned this way and that and held down by various objects: an onyx pot, a shell casing, chunks of ore. Seeing Delaney's eyes on them, he plucked through the objects and held one up. It was nut-sized, grayish, flattened on one side.

—Do you know what this is?

—Looks like lead, Delaney said.

—Exactly, Kosterlitzky said. Musket ball, fired from a Confederate States of America flintlock into my back by a Blue Mountain Apache back in 1869. How I managed to get shot by such a crude instrument was no doubt a cause for mirth among my men. Do you know that in your civil war battle at Manassas, ten thousand bullets were fired for every man killed or wounded? A soldier would have been very unlucky indeed to have been wounded in such a battle.

—My brother was in that war. He fought at a place called Antietam. I think it was the following year.

—Ah yes, Antietam. By then things had changed. The Union troops had been issued Springfields, with rifled barrels. A whole different kettle of fish, I believe your expression is. Deadly at 400 meters or more. Over 20,000 casualties in that fight. The bloodiest day of that war.

—You seem to have made a study of it.

Kosterlitzky shrugged.

—I am a military man. I take a professional interest in such things.

He paused for a moment, his fingers steepled beneath his chin.

—One would be foolish not to study such a pattern of history, especially one so close to home. Like your country, Mexico first had to free itself from the control of a European power. Then, not even a hundred years later, a civil war, a counter-revolution. One looks at Mexico and…well. President Díaz is hopeful that our country may avoid a similar tragedy.

He lifted the misshapen lead lump into his fist as if he would distinguish some mystical provenance, then cast it back among the various stacks of paper. He leaned back, touching a place on his back just above his ribcage.

—Of course, another few inches left or right would have been even more humorous, to have such a primitive, wretched thing suddenly subtract one from the world of the living. At any rate, I finally had to have Doctor Estévez remove it. It had begun to interfere with drawing my saber, which you understand is essential to my trade. Something expected from the Eagle of Sonora. Otherwise one's saber might be perceived as mere affectation.

He sighed.

—Imagine a world in which a cavalry charge still made a certain amount of sense. I am afraid your battle of Manassas may have been its death knell.

He opened his hands to encompass the contents on the desk before him.

—Bah, he said. Just look at this. Paperwork. The bane of my existence. Endless reams of it. Executive orders, requisitions, receipts, bills of lading. I suppose it is the price one must pay for the pleasures of being so often in the field. Upon his return he inevitably finds such bureaucratic tasks awaiting him.

—I suppose.

—Well, Kosterlitzky said, turning and crossing one gleaming boot over the other. Was there something you wished to speak to me about?

—Yes. I have been thinking about it. I believe I would like to take you up on your offer, if it still stands. Like you said, be of service to the state.

Kosterlitzky had turned again to look through the window across the tops the adobe walls, at the expanse of sky over the school, cloudless now, perfectly blue.

—I thought maybe you could use me, especially now you're down a couple of men. Maybe help you recover the McComas boy.

Kosterlitzky brought his chair back around, a quizzical look on his face.

—What's that?

—Little Charlie McComas. The boy they think Bonito might have took.

Kosterlitzky smiled.

—Ah, yes. The norteamericano child. I did hear something about that. I am afraid the prospects are not promising. For one thing, the Apache almost always kill their captives when attacked.

—Even children?

—Yes. It is not clear why, except that they are reluctant to surrender the booty they have acquired. I suppose it is a matter of pride—or spite. Who can say? But that is not the most significant problem.

—It's not?

—No. The most significant problem is that Apache captives—particularly captive children—rarely wish to be

returned to their former lives. Not after a few months, at any rate. At least that has been my experience. They seem to find life among the Indians congenial—freeing, I suppose you might say—rather like being on permanent holiday. Going about half naked, not being required to attend school or church. Even if they are returned to civilization they are never quite the same. Do you see what I mean?

Delaney sat, his hat in his lap, the sunlight from the window canted across the wall at Kosterlitzky's back.

—I guess so. Man once told me the same thing about my horse.

Again Kosterlitzky's brow knit in an expression of incomprehension.

—Your horse?

—Yes, the one I had in Utah.

—Ah, Kosterlitzky said. Now I remember. The one the Paiutes took.

—Yes. The man I was with told me that I might get him back but he wouldn't never be the same horse I had before. I couldn't make out what he meant.

—Well, Kosterlitzky said. It seems straightforward enough. Take Manolo there, our little bootblack friend.

He nodded over his shoulder toward the doorway.

—Choosing the freedom of a sunny day over the stuffiness and discipline of the schoolroom. It is a decision one can certainly understand—as I have said, I too hated school as a child—but obviously an unwise one. Without the imposition of discipline, this pattern of truancy may mark him for life, become an ingrained part of his personality. Men are the same, I believe. Living outside the law for any period of time makes it difficult for them to return to a settled life. They are like children who have lived among the Apache. There is something in that sort of existence that speaks to them, makes civilization seem false and burdensome. Flabby, weak. The outlaw life seems to offer the promise of freedom. Of course, just the opposite is true. True freedom for any man requires

that he place restraints upon his appetites. Moral restraints. Men of intemperate habits can never be free. Their passions forge their shackles. Have you not observed this to be the case?

—I don't know. I suppose.

—Of course, as a military man that would naturally be my position.

Kosterlitzky leaned back in his chair.

—In any event I congratulate you on your decision. Most commendable on your part. I did not know you had taken an interest in the McComas incident.

—I hadn't. Your priest has been educating me on the ways of the Apache. He's a powerful talker.

—Hah, Kosterlitzky said, smiling and smoothing down the corners of his moustache. He is indeed. Good Padre Sandoval. And about as full of beans as one man can easily be. Is that the correct English expression, 'full of beans'?

—I expect so.

—He sees himself as some kind of medieval fighting monk, riding up and down the country smiting the heathen hip and thigh.

—Gray Owl, Delaney said, widening his eyes.

This time Kosterlitzky leaned back in his chair and laughed.

—I told him he seemed to be following in Padre Kino's footsteps, Delaney said. He seemed pleased.

—I can imagine. Music to his ears. At least he is trying to undo some of the mischief that idiot Kino did in bringing the horse to the Apache. The consequences of which, as you have seen for yourself, are still very much with us.

—Yes.

Kosterlitzky turned again to look out the window, rocking in his chair, his arms crossed.

—You know, of course I complain sometimes—grow discouraged even—but it is toward this end that all our labors are dedicated. Sitting here in a fine government building watching young children pass into the school next door to be

educated. Laws—governance—are necessary so that this vision of civilized life may come to pass, outside the threats of banditry, terror, bloodshed. There are many forces that would tear us asunder, not just the Apache. The other tribes in this state—the Yaqui, the Pima, the Mayo—have never been fully pacified, even after 150 years. The Seri, out there on Tiburón. Nomadic, utterly wild—fought three rebellions against the Spanish in the eighteenth century. And then there is the greatest threat of all.

Kosterlitzy had located a pencil amidst all the debris on his desk and began tapping it absently against the desk top. He seemed to be waiting.

—Which is? Delaney finally said.

Kosterlitzy looked up at him.

—The railroad. You have heard about the new railroad connecting Guaymas and Nogales, of course.

—No.

—Completed just last October. Something of a miracle, you know. The distance between the two points is only some 575 kilometers—a mere 350 miles—but you will recall that it famously took the Mexicans thirty-seven years to construct the Ferrocarril Mexicano between Mexico City and Vera Cruz, and that was an even shorter distance—only 400 kilometers. And what has changed, you ask, to make such a miracle possible? Why, the participation of the North Americans, what else? Of course the gringos—in specific the gentlemen at the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad—have their own reasons for involving themselves in this project. It seems that their progress toward the Pacific was blocked by rival railroads at the town of Needles, California. The only solution was to redirect their tracks southward, toward Guaymas. And presto, it was done—no problem for Yankee derring-do. What took the Mexicans thirty-seven years to accomplish they managed in about as many months. The last spike was driven in Nogales just last October. But now you see the problem, yes?

—No, Delaney said.

Kosterlitzky smiled.

—The problem is, why would anyone wish to go to Guaymas? I am afraid that few people share my sentimental attachment to the place. What ships would wish to sail up into the Gulf of California to put in at Guaymas when they have all those bustling California ports on the Pacific from which to choose? San Diego, San Pedro, Oakland—what ship would wish to dock instead in a sleepy Mexican fishing village? Yet the solution to that problem may be a simple one as well.

Again Kosterlitzky paused as if waiting for Delaney to arrive at some obvious conclusion. For a moment he did feel like a dull schoolboy in the sunny room next door where Señor Fuentes sat impatiently tapping his pencil on the desk across from him.

—It may? Delaney said.

—Yes.

Kosterlitzky placed the pencil down among the stacks of papers.

—Well? Delaney finally said.

—Buy it, Kosterlitzky said..

Delaney looked at him.

—Buy Guaymas?

—No, of course not. That would be very shortsighted of the gringos. Small potatoes, as your expression has it. Buy Sonora. Or annex it, which amounts to the same thing.

—Buy Sonora?

—Certainly. Why not? It is a time-honored tradition where these things are concerned. First advertise Guaymas in the U.S. newspapers. Draw attention to its vast mineral wealth, its year-round growing season. The legendary beauty and fecundity of its women. Paint it as a tropical paradise.

Kosterlitzy raised his hands as if holding up a picture.

—Now instead of a sleepy fishing village you have Nuevo Guaymas, Gem of the California Gulf! But herein lies the difficulty. Those new emigrants, eager to populate the place and grow rich, will not wish to live as expatriates or, still less,

as Mexicans. They will wish to live as norteamericanos in one of the United States of America.

—So Mexico would be willing to sell Sonora?

—Of course not, Kosterlitzky said. President Díaz would be incensed by such a suggestion. But one must consider the precedents. Did not a previous president of Mexico, one Antonio López de Santa Anna, accept a gratuity of ten million dollars in exchange for that portion of the Arizona and New Mexico Territories which until very recently you called home? Monies that Santa Anna accepted not on behalf of the Mexican people or its duly elected government but which he used to line his own pockets. At the same time, Santa Anna knew the consequences of saying no to the gringos. He had already managed to be invaded twice, first losing Texas to them and then watching the stars and stripes raised over Chapultepec Castle. If the gringos had wanted the whole country then, they could have had it. And would have, except for certain high-minded individuals in your country who could not stomach the prospect of seeing more slave-owning states come into the Union. Now that you have fought your civil war those objections no longer pertain.

Kosterlitzky leaned forward and began leafing through one of the stacks of paper on his desk.

—Wait, he said. I have it here somewhere, a copy of a letter from the superintendent of the AT&SF himself, a Mr. Albert A. Robinson, reporting back to the powers that be. A friend in the consul's office sent it to me.

He plucked out a single sheet.

—Ah, here it is.

He held it up before him and read.

—'This project would bring adventurers, who will persistently work for, and finally succeed in obtaining another Texas from the territory of Old Mexico.'

Kosterlitzky let the page drop back down upon his desk.

—So there you have it. The master plan. 'Another Texas.' Mexico is like a carcass hanging in the butcher's shop

from which the gringos will select the prime cuts, and Sonora has always been the choicest cut of all. Mineral wealth, pastureland, access to the sea. With the railroad completed, keeping Sonora safe from brigands and the Apache will be only a small part of the problem. Keeping it out of the hands of greedy gringos will require a heroic effort.

Again Kosterlitzky smiled.

—Not exactly the Battle of Borodino but then again not so dissimilar either. Keeping the behemoth at bay until it slays itself. At any rate, I am happy to hear that you may wish to contribute to such an effort. I suppose I should ask if you might find it troubling to be brought into likely conflict with your fellow countrymen. Because the Sonorans will fight any foreign adventurism, I do assure you. They always have, ever since the filibuster William Walker planted his silly flag in La Paz thirty years ago. Already the hacendados are up in arms to have their lands confiscated for this railroad right of way.

Kosterlitzky was looking at him now, rocking a little in his chair, his arms crossed upon his chest.

—I got no particular dog in this fight, Delaney said. I think you said something to that effect back in Batuc—the thing about passing the boundary stone not seeming to mean very much. I've been pretty much on my own since I was sixteen. That's why I would like to give this here a try.

Kosterlitzky sat rocking for a moment longer, then sighed and brought forward a different stack of paper. He pulled off several pages, pausing to lick his thumb and forefinger and placing the discarded pages face down on the table.

—A most commendable offer on your part. However, I am afraid I must decline. It seems that Mexico City has placed certain restrictions upon my…recruitment methods. There is a new so-called progressive element represented in the cabinet, all part of our movement into this brave new world. So I am afraid I must decline. But here—

He removed a sheet of paper, looked at it and slid it across the desk toward him.

—I believe I may have found some suitable employment for you here in Sonora. At Minas Prietas, about thirty kilometers south of here. Many years ago those mines were abandoned by their owners as unprofitable. But now North American interests have entered the picture, instituting the most modern practices and operating with great success. Mr. Covington Johnson, the superintendent there, is a good friend of mine. I have taken the liberty of writing him on your behalf. He assures me that he has a position suited to a person with your qualifications as an engineer.

Kosterlitzy smiled.

—Perhaps the fact that you share the same last name will count in your favor.

—In the mines?

—But of course. The silver has mostly played out but there is still an abundance of copper. Previously left behind by earlier generations of miners as worthless but now quite highly esteemed. Necessary for the transmission of electricity, you know—the telegraph, the telephone. It is the miracle substance of the modern world. Far more valuable than gold or silver, when you think about it.

—The mines?

—But of course. My men and I patrol regularly through that district. We shall check in on you from time to time and see how you are doing. You can see your new friends Corporal Briggs and Father Sandoval.

8. Minas Prietas

He woke with his face on the floor. There was the taste of blood in his mouth. But then he slept again. He dreamed that he was riding once again on the Mazocahui road with Sandoval, Sandoval leaning over speaking into his ear while he kept his eyes on the landscape unspooling before him. The unique rocks and draws and stands of trees.

—That Agua Prieta road you were started on, Sandoval was saying. Where else did you think it might lead except to Las Minas Prietas? You were thinking Hermosillo? Over hills and vales, from Arizona to Sinaloa, from Chihuahua to the sea. Past the Slough of Despair and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, yet the Celestial City I am afraid must remain forever out of reach. Still, no journey can be said to have been undertaken for naught. Each reaches its destination, however unintended.

Sandoval's attention was now returned to the descansos, the markers of previous lost and unknown travelers slain upon this road. Delaney had pulled his kerchief over his face against the dust kicked up by the riders ahead. Still, the taste of earth was in his mouth. Beside him Sandoval had removed a silver cruet from his tunic, unstoppered it and was sprinkling drops of holy water onto the rocks.

—For what it's worth, your path follows that of good St. Christopher, a reprobate like yourself. In fact, that was his given name: Reprobus. You are familiar with his journey, having made it yourself. First he was bodyguard to a king, but then he noticed how the king sighed and crossed himself whenever he heard the devil's name, and so he went in search of Satan, obviously the greater power. He found him in the desert at the head of a mighty host and he joined him and for years went about the country committing all sorts of terrible crimes. But then one day they came upon a descanso with a cross—

Sandoval pointed out one that they were just passing. It was constructed of a broken sotol cactus stalk, its jagged ends painted red.

—which caused Satan to flee the road and leave Reprobus where he was, standing beside a wild river. This was the Río Sonora, which rises near the border with your country and empties into the Gulf of California. There he took up his post, helping fellow travelers cross to the other side.

Delaney had pulled down his mask to spit, the road dust powdery and alkaline.

—That's it?

—No, Sandoval said. You remember that child you saw carved into the keystone arch of the Iglesia de San Francisco Javier that morning you rode into Batuc?

—I think so.

While hearing all of this Delaney had been riding holding the reins of his horse loosely but remaining vigilant of his surroundings. Even though he knew that he was dreaming he could feel the barrel of the horse between his legs.

—I know you think that you are dreaming. Such is life. A dream within a dream. As you are witnessing for yourself.

—Yes. Well, is that all?

—No, Sandoval said. Some say that in his former life Reprobus was a dog-headed man. A creature that barked and bayed at the moon and practiced cannibalism.

—The point being what?

—The point being that it is a condition of monsters that they do not perceive themselves as such. That Reprobus, like every man, can finally only be known by what he chooses to serve. Your choices have been the same as his, at least in thought if not in deed.

They rode on for a time in silence. He could see the backs of the two horsemen ahead of them. One of them was riding a grullo, meaning that both the horse and Miguel, its rider, were still alive. As if to prove the point, Miguel turned and nodded back at him, the wound beneath his ribcage clearly evident through the bloody hole in his tunic. Sandoval nodded in his direction.

—There is a wonderful depiction of that very thing, the spear wound in the side, on one of the murals in the church at San Miguel Arcángel in Ixmiquilpan. It is a long way from here. Two thousand kilometers due south, much farther than you intended to go but who knew? I shall have to take you there.

—Over 1,200 miles.

Sandoval smiled.

— Yes. San Miguel Arcángel. He too was in that carving over the threshold at Batuc. One of the ones you mistook for an Opata.

—Yes.

Sandoval had turned away to survey the passing country. Set up into the mountain sides were the ruins of ancient stone houses, their little terraces holding precious handfuls of soil. All along the Mazocahui road they had ridden through a blurry landscape of mists, fogs and occasional showers. He remembered that the water in the streams was slow-flowing and opalescent, slightly bitter with the taste of iron. He wished he had some of it now to clear the dust from his mouth.

—Padre Kino himself passed along this very road, Sandoval said.

—Padre Kino.

—Yes, Padre Kino. Padre a cavallo. His first mission was just a few kilometers north of here. He named it Nuestra Señora de los Dolores. Our Lady of Sorrows. For who was given more to bear than our Blessed Mother?

—That was a painting of her back on the church in Mazocahui?

—One and the same. Although here she is called the Virgin of Guadalupe because that is the name she chose for herself when she first appeared among the Aztecs. She spoke to them in their own language, which was Nahuatl, and told them that she had come to crush the stone serpent in his gaudy quetzal feathers and coral jewelry. To bring light to a benighted world. You have seen this serpent for yourself, have you not? Marked in bands of red, black and cream, with its head hidden beneath its body?

—Yes, its tail was making a popping sound.

Sandoval nodded gravely.

—One and the same. So you understand why we have found ourselves met here.

Delaney looked again at the remains of the stone houses and trincheras set among the black lava rocks.

—Who were these people? Why did they choose to live in such a place as this?

—They were afraid. They fled into the desert.

—Afraid of what?

Here Sandoval raised a hand.

—Un momento. I am afraid that discussion must await another time. You see how Miguel keeps looking back? I promised him a word.

He smiled.

—Perhaps he wishes to arrange for a descanso marking his death. This would be a good spot for one. If so, you could help.

Sandoval gave a nod, kicked up his horse.

—Vaya con dios, mi amigo.

He was awake now. His mouth where the blood had been was gritty with clay. He lifted his face and tried to spit it out. He could not move his arms, and it took him several minutes to understand that this was because they were bound behind him. He could remember some of what had happened but not all. He had ridden down from Hermosillo. It had been raining, a long day of winter rain which the natives called las equipatas—common this time of year. Minas Prietas, when he paused at the pass to look down at it, seemed a sort of dreamscape, menacing and vacant. Devoid of vegetation, the red earth was churned up into a quagmire, the water pooling in viscid puddles amidst the sprawl of buildings. At each end of the camp stood a twin-chimneyed smelter, joined together by a mountainous slagheap. The miners were quartered in wood and adobe hovels covered with tin sheeting held down by stones. The misting rain held the smoke in the air. He remembered a teacher he had had once long ago inveighing against the dark, Satanic mills, and, sitting his horse there in the pass, the true meaning of this phrase came to him for the first time. He could imagine this as a fate to which he had been

consigned—either by Kosterlitzky or some even higher power. Minas Prietas, the Brown Mines, a mythical place of perdition. An underworld. A purgatory.

The mill town was laid out haphazardly but he quickly found a cantina and began drinking mezcal. In parting, Kosterlitzky had given him a hundred pesos, and in this establishment mezcal was going for ten centavos a cup. He did not know how long he had been there before the shift boss found him. When the man came in, Delaney was sitting at the end of the plank bar having a conversation with a stuffed bear. It was a large rufous-colored bear standing erect on its back feet. He was telling the bear that anyone who lived in the West long enough had his bear story to tell, that he had one himself. It had taken place in the Mormon territory of southeastern Utah when a bear had emerged unexpectedly from a pine thicket not twenty yards away. It had spooked his horse, his pack animal had broken free and he wound up thrown headfirst onto the road. He said that he had since learned from Sandoval about the Apaches' fear of these beasts. How they were careful to avoid them—their lairs, their trails, their droppings, anything connected with them. How they thought that bears were the reincarnated ghosts of humans who had been criminals in their earthly lives and had been made to live inside bears as punishment. He sat for a time considering this particular bear in light of this newly acquired information. Looking about at the other men drinking in this smoky doggery with the rain rattling on the tin roof overhead, he decided that it could be so. That the Apache might be right. He had turned to solicit the opinion of whoever might be sitting next to him, and that man had turned out to be the shift boss, a Mexican named Peña.

—Guapo, Peña said. Bienvenido a Minas Prietas. They said I would find you here. Your shift goes below in half an hour. Perhaps you should think about dunking your head in that water barrel over there for a few minutes first.

He had reached over then and picked up one of Delaney's hands from off the bar.

—And I am afraid I must warn you. You may get your pretty white hands dirty.

While the Mexican was holding his right hand, Delaney had groped along the bar with his left until it closed upon the mezcal bottle, and once he had it he turned and swung it across the man's face. After that he could not remember much. Many hands had seized him and grappled him down onto the mud floor. Someone had hit him with something—a truncheon, a metal bar, a pistol butt. Now with his arms tied behind him he could not inspect the damage, but he could feel the swelling on his skull that the blow had left. He tried to sit upright but was too dizzy. So he lay back down against the earthen floor and slept.

When he next awoke, there were two men standing over him. One was holding a lantern, which he lowered toward his face. They both looked to be men in their forties, one thick and burly, the other thinner, both with mustaches.

—You're Americans?

—That's right, the larger of the two men said.

—Can you get me out of here? A bunch of Mexes jumped me over in the cantina. They got me trussed up like a hog.

—Sure, we can do that, the burly man said. My name is Bob Hatch, Deputy Sheriff of Cochise County, Arizona Territory. This here is Deputy Sheriff Billy Daniels.

Together the two men helped get him into a sitting position, and one of them released the rope that had been tied beneath his biceps. They dragged him over so that his back was against the wall, and one of them held a tin cup of water down in front of his chest.

—That's who we are, Hatch said.

He squatted so that his face was close to Delaney's.

—And this is you.

He produced a thin metallic square from inside his coat and held it up before Delaney's eyes. It was a tintype image of Delaney standing with his boot up on a log and a painted screen behind him depicting buffalos on a prairie. He had two

Navy Colts stuck in his belt and a Winchester in the crook of his arm. He remembered nothing about having the picture taken. In it he looked very drunk

—That looks like me, all right. Where did you get it?

—Friend of yours from Bisbee. Said it was taken one night in Silver City. That there was a medicine show there and that all you boys got your pictures took.

—What friend from Bisbee? I never been to Bisbee in my life.

Hatch's gaze was fixed on him.

—That's not what Big Dan says. He says you were in Bisbee on the evening of December 8. And Deputy Sheriff Daniels here saw you there too.

The other man, the one named Daniels—slimmer, a little younger perhaps—came walking into the light.

—That's right. With my own eyes. I was playing billiards in my saloon twenty minutes prior to the shooting when a stranger came in to warm himself. He stood by the stove for three or four minutes, looking about careless-like, then walked back out. I noted the face, recognized it when I seen it again in that picture Deputy Hatch is holding and again right now in the flesh, looking at you. You're the stranger who was in my place the night of the shooting.

Delaney looked back and forth between the two of them.

—You're making a mistake, he said. Who is this Big Dan?

—We know you must have a lot going on in your head right now, Hatch said. Maybe we ought to give you time to sort it out.

—Look, Delaney said. I expect this is about that trouble in Clifton last year. I became involved when I tried to help a lady being abused by a drunken cowboy. In the fight I wound up killing him. It was self-defense but I couldn't wait for the trial because some of the man's friends were out looking to even things. Clifton is not like Tucson where you have a sheriff like Bob Paul. In Clifton it's Judge Lynch runs things.

Hatch was chewing tobacco, and he turned and spat toward the wall.

—Nope, he said. That aint the business before us today.

—Maybe you should tell him how we come to make our way down here, Daniels said.

—Sure, Hatch said. I can do that. Seems Dr. Goodwin, who is the Wells Fargo agent in Nogales, was in Hermosillo checking up on some fellows been passing counterfeit bills. One of the people he talked to couldn't help with that but did mention he had seen an unknown gringo—that would be you—riding with Kosterlitzky's outfit. Then he recalled you from one of them shady cow deals up in the Swisshelms—

—The Swisshelms? That wasn't me. That was—

He stopped. Hatch looked at Daniels.

—There you go, he said. Good as a confession.

Daniels nodded.

—Anyway, he knew that you was wanted on this Bisbee thing. Doc Goodwin contacted the authorities in Hermosillo and learned that you had moved on to Minas Prietas. He then telegraphed Sheriff Ward in Tombstone, who in turn telegraphed Mr. Covington Johnson, the mine superintendent here, asking for his help. Only it turns out his assistance wasn't really needed since you had already managed to get yourself loaded up on mezcal and in a bar scrap with a dozen Mexicans and throwed into the hoosegow all in one fell swoop. Been here, what, half a day?

Delaney rubbed his hand along the back of his head. There was dried blood there and what seemed like a noticeable indentation in his skull.

—What day is it today? he said.

—Today's Sunday, Hatch said. January 13, 1884.

—I will say it again, I've never been to Bisbee in my life.

—Understood, Hatch said. And those five innocent folks who got killed in Bisbee last month all shot theirselves. One of them, Miz Annie Roberts, pregnant with her first-born, while standing in the door of the Bisbee House.

—And Deputy Sheriff Tom Smith, Daniels said. He was a friend of mine.

Delaney shook his head. He raised the tin cup to his mouth and drank.

—You made it the furthest, if that's any consolation, Hatch said.

Delaney lowered the cup. The water had a rusty taste.

—What do you mean?

—Howard and Sample was picked up outside Maud Elby's whorehouse in Clifton.

—Moths to the candle flame, Daniels said.

—Sample give one of the whores that gold watch you all took from the Castaneda store safe. Not too bright.

—Your boy York Kelly was took two days later off the train between Deming and El Paso, Daniels said. Turned around to see who had sat down behind and found Dan Tucker's Colt poked in his ear.

—You and Dowd made yourselves a little harder to catch, lighting out for Sonora the way you did. But Deputy Sheriff Daniels here struck Big Dan's trail in Bavispe and followed him on to Janos and Corralitos. Took him two weeks ago—New Year's Day—celebrating in Corralitos with some newfound friends. Returned him to El Paso, Texas, locked up inside an express car, courtesy of the Mexican Central Railroad.

—Seemed a changed man making that trip back north, Daniels said. Sittin in that boxcar give him some time to sober up and ruminate. Especially once he realized what I had come to get him for.

—And last but not least, we rounded up the brains of the operation, if you want to call him that. Flash Johnny Haith, currently residing alongside his pals in the Cochise County jail.

—Which leaves you, Daniels said.

Delaney sat with his head down, holding the cup between his knees.

—All of this is news to me. I don't know what you're talking about.

—Sure, Hatch said. That's why we're telling you. What is not news to you is what happened back on December 8 in Bisbee.

Delaney closed his eyes.

—Like I told you, I never been to the place in my life.

—Well, Hatch said, rising to his feet. Have it your way. You get some rest now. Tomorrow morning early you and me are off for Hermosillo. Deputy Sheriff Daniels here is bound for Tombstone to fetch Sheriff Ward and District Attorney Smith. They'll meet us there with the warrant. Personally, I would just as soon follow Deputy Daniels' example and throw you into the next baggage car headed north but Mark Smith appears dead set to do this by the book. Anyway, shouldn't be long until you'll be happily reunited with your friends Tex, Big Dan, Red, Yorkie and Flash Johnny Haith in the Tombstone jail.

—If we're going to Hermosillo maybe you could speak with Captain Kosterlitzky. I've been riding with his company for quite a while now. He can put in a good word for me.

He saw Hatch smile.

—Kosterlitzky? That smooth-talking Rooskie son of a bitch? How do you think you found your way into this jackpot to begin with? It was him who served you up on a silver platter, care of Mr. Covington Johnson.

Delaney looked at Hatch, then at Daniels.

—Well, Mr. Spicer then. Wells W. Spicer, attorney at law. He was the magistrate in Tombstone until recently. He can vouch for me.

Hatch cocked his head.

—Spicer? That bottom-dealing bastard? Let the Earps and Holiday off scot-free after shooting Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers while they was trying to surrender? Give lawmen everywhere a bad name.

He spat again toward the wall, then looked at Daniels.

—You want the pleasure of telling him or can I?

—Go ahead, Daniels said.

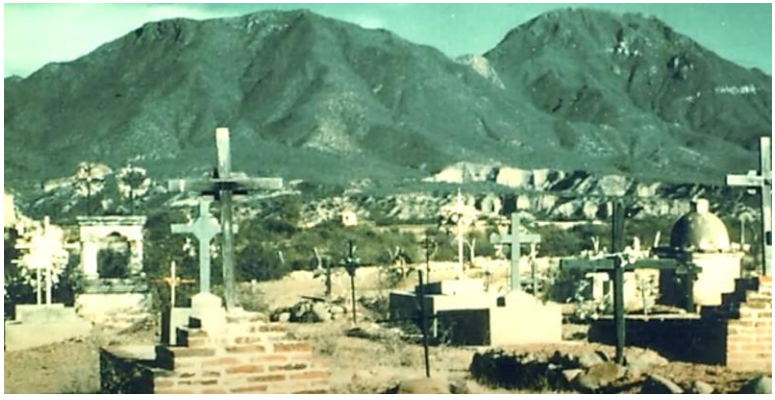
—Spicer's gone under. Put his whole stake into some cockamamie mine up in the Quijotoas. Vein run out. Went crazy, we heard. Just went walking off into the desert—suicide,

they said. Body wasn't found. Probably working some insurance angle.

—Good riddance, Daniels said.

Hatch was standing now, and it was Daniels who knelt before him. He produced a pair of handcuffs, snapped his wrists into them and dropped a second set of shackles at his feet.

—In the meantime you can try these here on for size, he said. I expect they'll become a more or less permanent part of your wardrobe from here on out.



PART TWO

1. Octavia Stillman

It was my brother Horace whose idea it was that I come west. He had opened a freight service in a little place called Bisbee in the Arizona Territory and had himself appointed postmaster. I arrived there in the spring of 1881 from Bridgeport, Connecticut. I was twenty-one. Prior to this journey the farthest I had ever been away from home was to attend Henniker Academy in New Hampshire, which at that time seemed a great distance from Bridgeport—200 miles!—and a wonderful adventure. Bridgeport to Bisbee was over ten times that—2,500 miles, ten days on the train across the entire length and breadth of the country: Bridgeport to Philadelphia to Chicago to St. Louis. Then the St. Louis and San Francisco line to Albuquerque. Then the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe to Tucson, Arizona Territory, and finally a spur line to the town of Benson. And even then I was still two days away from my destination. From Benson I traveled by stagecoach to Tombstone, a bruising, bone-jarring excursion over 'roads' entirely undeserving of the name. All they really amounted to were tracks where the sage brush and mesquite had been cut back sufficiently to allow the coach to slip through. Then it was over the pass—the grade so steep we were required to get out and walk a good portion of the way—and down the canyon into Bisbee. We made the trip at night out of fear of the Apache, who were then on the warpath, not yet having been pacified by General Crook. I remember watching the sun come up that first morning in Bisbee and thinking I had arrived at the remotest spot on the planet. Or upon a different planet altogether, for that matter.

But here is one providential thing that occurred. On our long stagecoach journey—twenty-five miles from Benson to

Tombstone and another twenty-five on to Bisbee—each a full night's journey requiring numerous stops and periods of walking—I made the acquaintance of two gentlemen, brothers, who had staked a claim in the Mule Mountains and were going into that country to prospect. For gold! They were from Elmhurst, Illinois, and their names were Galen and Abner Ralston. They were gentlemen of middle age, lifelong bachelors, and they grew more and more animated as they spoke about the endeavor upon which they were embarked. Young as I was, they took me into their confidence. It seemed that the thing they were contemplating involved a mine that had previously been abandoned. Actually, 'lost' might be the more accurate term. The mountains of southern Arizona were being rummaged through by the Spanish beginning centuries ago, you know. Why, in 1540 it was by way of the San Pedro River valley, just west of Tombstone, that the young conquistador Coronado launched his famous incursion into the desert Southwest. In any event, the Ralston brothers had made the acquaintance of an antiquities dealer in St. Louis who was in possession of an old Spanish document, including a map, which gave the locations of several such mines in the Mule Mountains. According to this document, a Jesuit priest named Eusebio Kino and his Papago Indian converts had begun working in the area in 1698, mining gold and melting it down into ingots using a homemade smelter. It was dangerous work, given the presence of the hostile Apache, sworn blood enemies of the Spanish. Periodically, the gold would be loaded up and transported south to the capital—at least theoretically. The Jesuits had a reputation for withholding from the Spanish crown its 'Royal Fifth'—and, at times, the other four-fifths as well!—which eventually led to their expulsion from the New World in 1767 by King Charles. Sometime around that time the Mule Mountain mines were abandoned and their entrances sealed, to await a more propitious day.

The Ralstons understood very well the familiar canard of the mythical 'lost mine,' of course. Almost always such tales prove to be mere 'hum bug' and will 'o the wisp. But their

friend in St. Louis was a man of unimpeachable reputation, and the document he possessed seemed genuine enough. Furthermore, he informed the brothers that a series of small earthquakes had recently revealed the presence of several old mines in that area, making extensive sleuthing and excavation unnecessary. In short, the brothers decided that the project was worth a go—and that the prospect of adventure would offset any expense, hardship or disappointment they might meet. It was a sentiment with which I found myself in hearty agreement.

I remember very clearly my first impressions upon arriving in little Bisbee. It was a string bean of a town, located along the intersection of two gulches. First was Mule Gulch—the so-called 'business district'—which meandered along for some distance before intersecting a second declivity known as Brewery Gulch, home to the cluster of saloons, by far the most thriving businesses in town. Most of the townspeople lived in cabins set in niches hollowed out of the walls of these two slender canyons, with steps leading up to their doors. The population was a busy, shifting one. It was definitely an egalitarian affair, with issues of class and family pedigree largely irrelevant, an 'every-man-for-himself' affair in the race to make good. Of course, in addition to the well-disposed, there was a rougher element, and in the absence of well-established institutions of law and order, episodes of violence were not uncommon. Ever present too was the threat of attack from the Apache. It was the true 'wild west' all right, and nothing like what could have been imagined back in Connecticut. Still, Bisbee had the reputation of being far quieter than a place like Tombstone—this probably owing to its smaller size as much as anything else.

My brother Horace was there to meet me when I stepped down off the Tombstone stage. We walked down Mule Gulch, and Horace showed me around. There were perhaps a dozen structures, none of them particularly permanent-looking. There was a café run by a Portuguese man and his Mexican

wife, which consisted of a single table set out beneath a tree. There was a doctor who was a morphine addict and entirely unskilled in medicine. The mayor was a man known only as Little Nick. There were some Chinese working the mines, but I was informed that one of the first laws passed in the camp stipulated that no Chinaman should be found there after dark. When I inquired as to the reasoning behind such an edict, Horace said only that their cooking was found objectionable. This seemed odd to me, and I examined his face to see if he might be 'having me on' but, considering the overall strangeness of the place, I decided that that would be a topic for another time. Later I learned that Bisbee had been established as a 'white man's camp,' with the Chinese afforded the status not of residents but of mere day laborers.

The tour of Bisbee was quickly completed. The saloons amounted to little more than tents or tarpaulins stretched up over a framework of wooden beams. Inside men stood before planks of sawn lumber drinking whiskey and eating beans off tin plates with spoons. The 'school' proved to be an abandoned miner's shack with no floor, no windows, no doors. Instead, two or three boards had been removed from a wall to allow passage in and out. Horace said he thought that all told there might be perhaps a dozen potential pupils in the camp, these ranging in age from five to sixteen. A large iron bell had been hung up at the mine to sound the alarm should there be a sighting of Apache, a signal requiring the school's immediate evacuation. When I asked about books, he confessed that, regrettably, there were none to be had at present but suggested that pupils might bring whatever reading materials were in their homes: Bibles, almanacs, seed catalogues and the like. I tried to imagine such a scene: the disused miner's shack; the reluctant scholars of every age, size and nationality being taught to read from seed catalogues. Undertaking such a task would require a teacher of truly heroic proportion, which I knew even then I most assuredly was not.

And so I knew that I must disappoint my brother in not becoming the camp teacher. Looking back upon it now, I

believe two things contributed to my decision, in addition to the unappealing squalor of little Bisbee. For one, during my academic study at Henniker Academy I had been made acutely aware what life as a teacher must entail. This, after all, was the profession for which nearly all my female classmates were preparing themselves. First and foremost, I knew that the female teacher must remain unmarried during her tenure; that, in fact, she must not be seen in the company of any young man except at school events or church functions; that she must not ride in a carriage with any male other than a close relative, or travel beyond the city limits alone, or be seen loitering in shops or emporia lest people misjudge her character. Upon reflection, it occurred to me that in traveling unchaperoned all the way across America and then sharing a closed stagecoach at night with two unmarried gentlemen, I had breached these statutes several dozen times over! Perhaps things in a place like Bisbee—or in the West in general—might be a little different; still, the community's teacher would be expected to be a paragon of virtue, a model of decorum, a maidenly figure above reproach, if she were to be entrusted with educating the village's children.

And now I shall tell you of the second factor in my decision, something that may sound a bit 'farther afield' but which was also a product of my year in Henniker. You see, a striking peculiarity of that little New Hampshire community was its high incidence of congenital deafness. This phenomenon dated back to colonial times when one of its earliest citizens, a man named Nahum Thomas, had been a deaf mute. At that time it was supposed that deaf muteness was caused by a woman's terror during childbirth, but Nahum Thomas had had two children, both born deaf, and then five grandchildren—three of them deaf—and nine great-grandchildren, five of them deaf. For the old theory to hold true would thus have required a dozen women or more, in an ever-escalating pyramid, stricken by a childbearing hysteria far in excess of the norm. So, as is often the case, old ways of

understanding had to be set aside in favor of a new knowledge not rooted in ignorance and superstition. At any rate, as a result of extensive local inter-marriage, Henniker had come to have a very considerable deaf population, and to accommodate this fact had invented a sign language unique to that community. Speaking in signs was taught to children from an early age alongside the math tables and ABCs, and was employed throughout the village by hearing and non-hearing persons alike. Because of this practice, Hennikerians were known as 'the People of the Eye.' As may readily be imagined, the effect of this phenomenon upon outsiders like myself could be disconcerting. It was very common to find oneself among villagers or fellow students who were busily signing away, the contents of their communication entirely private to themselves. However significant the information being exchanged, for the outsider the cloak of silence was drawn down over all. It seemed as if I had been set down in the midst of a society even more secretive than the Freemasons or Rosicrucians or Illuminati, with all their mummery and mystic handshakes and esoteric signs.

Thinking back upon it now, I believe that is what life in the East had become for me. My estrangement at school gradually came to seem part of a larger pattern. This impression was further reinforced as I made my way across the state of Pennsylvania on the first leg of my journey west. I selected a seat by the window and made ready to have this momentous experience unfold before me. And mile after mile, what do you imagine struck me most? I shall tell you. It was the barns! Perhaps you have seen them—or pictures of them—all those rural barns marked with strange hex-like figures—birds and tulips and compass roses—as if their owners were in secret colloquy one with another. I asked the conductor about their meaning, but with a somewhat furtive look, he professed not to know. Perhaps it was thought impolitic or unlucky to speak of them. It was a silly thing, I know, but the notion rose in my mind that the very architecture of that part of the country, cryptic as it was, represented somehow a further

expansion of the People of the Eye. It was an expression of inwardness and clannishness, its message: 'Keep away.' And perhaps they had it on good authority. After all, the book of Proverbs itself contains the admonition, 'Discover not a secret to another.'

But I digress. I intended to say something about the place where I grew up. Bridgeport, Connecticut, was the epitome of a large and bustling Eastern seaport, home to some 100,000 souls. Then as now, it is a vast gray city of iron foundries and tanneries and corset-makers and milling machines. The seaport docks were dedicated to the proposition that commerce was the country's sacred calling. It seemed you could stand outside and hear the mechanical hum of the place, as if it were some vast engine itself. Although I knew other worlds existed, I cannot recall any moment in the first fifteen years of my life when I actually imagined myself stepping off into one of them. But then, in 1875, when I was fifteen, a man named Phineas T. Barnum was elected mayor. Mr. Barnum had entered the circus business some years prior, and the city of Bridgeport served as his winter headquarters. The experience of the circus itself did little for me, with all those poor, caged animals and wretched clowns. What drew me instead were the stage melodramas that often accompanied these larger performances, presentations that took the Wild West as their subject. There one might find Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack Omohundra and Captain Crawford, the Poet Scout of the Plains. Oh, there was nothing much to these pathetic little plays, but there, on stage, one could see ropers and trick shots and a trained Mexican burro named Jack Cass—get it?—and even real Indians. I remember seeing *The Trapper's Daughter* and *May Cody Lost and Won* and *Life on the Border*. Slight as these stories were, they had a powerful effect on an impressionable young girl. I remember the story of Texas Jack and Dove Eye, who was played by the famous Italian ballerina, Giuseppina Morlacchi—how she came to warn him when the savage Sioux were about to attack the fort. I know that it sounds silly. But

the world these performances depicted seemed so different from my own—and I knew that it was a world that was passing, or had perhaps already passed, and in such a short period of time, like a dream.

And so it must have been some combination of all these factors that confirmed me upon my decision to come west, with the final opportune stroke arriving in the form of Horace's invitation to join him in Bisbee. The necessary pretext was that I would be entering my future life as a teacher. However, as I have already intimated, I do not think I ever truly entertained that possibility. After a brief stay in Bisbee, as soon as I decently could, I bade my brother farewell and hired a boy with a wagon to drive me five miles west into the Mule Mountains. There I was reunited with the brothers Ralston and their dream of lost Spanish gold! It was agreed that I would serve as their housekeeper, a perfectly respectable position—not that I was particularly required to justify myself, living effectively outside the eye of society as I was. It was a simple proposition. As confirmed bachelors, they had little notion how to organize a household. They needed someone to cook and manage the place while they worked the mine.

Perhaps it seems strange that a young woman of my background and education would have settled into what many must imagine a life of drudgery and toil. But that is the point. It wasn't so—not to me. I cannot fully explain the appeal of the place, but compared to my former life, it seemed so vital, bursting with a kind of latent possibility, like a stage lighted and awaiting some undreamt-of performance to begin—something that would materialize in keeping with the beautiful, rugged landscape. The only way into our camp was by an obscure game trail. The hills rose steeply on all sides and were covered with exotic vegetation: wild grapevine and mountain mahogany and manzanita—green all year long with burnished red branches and, in the spring, bearing tiny fruit, hence the Spanish name 'little apples.' It seemed a place unvisited by man, unseen even. But such was not the case. There were pictographs drawn upon some of the higher rocks, and in our

valley were two low stone houses, both in need of some repair, thrown up inside a grove of stunted oaks. These had been the habitations of the original Spanish miners, now two centuries gone. Inside those rooms one could almost smell their presence, the experience of living alone in the wilderness 1,200 miles from Mexico City. Now the brothers Ralston and I were masters of this entire demesne, the two tumbledown cabins in the oak grove, the little valley itself with its seasonal stream and our very own mountain rising above us. At the foot of our valley was a spring of brackish water but then, farther up, there was a second spring where the precious fluid issued forth with great purity in all seasons. And at the crest of the ridge an even greater miracle still—a small hot spring that came burbling up from between two rock plates and was suitable for bathing. It was a wonderful surprise and the crowning glory of the entire picturesque scene.

It was a place for which I felt an immediate affinity, so great a departure was it from all I had ever known. It was a Spartan life, to be sure, but one that somehow suited me. The two cabins had dirt floors and fireplaces made of smooth river rocks that the brothers quickly repaired and made serviceable. The one that I principally occupied served as a kitchen and place to take meals, with my sleeping quarters separated by a hanging blanket. My bed was of canvas-covered straw, and I slept under several layers of blankets and quilts, every night being cold. The weather was far more consequential than any place I had ever known. The topography was high desert, at an elevation of just over a mile, and the climate capable of producing extremes of heat and cold, dry and wet. Our two little rock houses offered nothing like the insulation from the elements that is common in cities like Bridgeport. The notion of shelter in our canyon was a rudimentary one, little more than what the cave-dwelling authors of our pictographs must have known. Encountering a storm in such a place, with lightning and thunder and hail, was a soul-stirring experience. I was filled with awe at the power and proximity of the universe. I

found it inspiring to meet the world on its own terms. At school we had read Mr. Emerson, and I was familiar with his view of nature 'standing like the figure of Jesus with her head bent and hands folded upon her breast, the happiest man the one who learns from her the lesson of worship.' Such might be the impression, I thought, of a man standing ruminatively inside the bay window of his manse in Concord, Massachusetts, but I wondered what he might make of a midnight electrical storm in a rock cabin in the high desert chaparral of the Mule Mountains. Would he not perhaps be compelled to imagine a far more Zoroastrian universe, in which the proper worship of God was fire?

During those early days there were many other incidents of note. For example, in order to provide additional space for living, the Ralston brothers had constructed a lean-to attached to the side wall of my cabin. It was a simple affair, framed with mesquite poles and sided and roofed with a weaving of brush held together with adobe clay. It was a pleasant place in which to take an hour's respite, to escape the sometimes-oppressive interior of the cabin and, weather permitting, even to put out a pallet and sleep at night. It was upon one such occasion, dozing peacefully in my bower, that I was awakened by strange sounds from just beyond the flimsy brush wall. These sounds were various—a series of faint shrieks, something like a wailing child might make; some stifled groans, a few shrill whistle-like calls. Try as I might, I could think of nothing in nature—'neither fish nor flesh nor fowl'—capable of such sounds, and so I rose and pushed aside some of the weaving so that I might look outside. Imagine my surprise to find myself face to face with a great tawny cat! In the moonlight its eyes were orbs of green fire, and, seeing my hand moving among the withes, it bared its teeth and made a strange, gurgling, clicking sound in its throat. Next, a large, clawed foot appeared through the breach I had made in the screen. My scream awakened the Ralstons but by the time they arrived with their rifles the beast—a mountain lion, they said—was gone. I stepped out into the open space before the house. The first rays of dawn

were just falling upon the ridgeline to the west, and as I stood looking up I thought I saw a sudden flash of golden fire crest the mountain and disappear. My firecat. I have thought of it often from that day forward, although I have never seen it since. It seemed a creature unknown to zoos and encyclopedias, the kernel or seed out of which the rest of this Eden had sprung. I could not help but recall the wretched caged beasts I had seen in Mr. Barnum's circus and reflect that this was a world of a different sort: a terrestrial paradise unmarked by time's diminishments.

In addition to his animadversions on nature, Mr. Emerson speaks elsewhere of the 'iron bands of necessity' which encircle us all around—of how one's fate is the product of striking through these limitations and taking charge of what will be. I suppose that the notion of one's 'fate' is just as relevant in Connecticut as in Arizona, but it did not feel that way to me. Whatever presented itself back in the East was always bundled up inside too many layers of clothes—subtleties, rationalizations, justifications, evasions. How could one determine the forces opposing one—leave alone master them—if those forces were so enigmatic and obscured? I have spoken already of the People of the Eye and the cryptic barns of Pennsylvania and the great, gray, humming city of Bridgeport. In Arizona things seemed far simpler, and far more profound.

And so the Mule Mountains became my home for three years. To their disappointment, the brothers found no bars of Spanish bullion secreted in the mine—but hope still sprang eternal. There were abundant indications of silver and copper, and the enterprise continued to seem well worth the doing. Once a week the boy came out with our groceries—beans and beef and bacon and coffee—and I provided Galen and Abner the sustenance required for their work. I helped restore the old Spanish stone corral and looked after the two horses we kept there. Sometimes I would ride one of them into Bisbee to call on Horace, who seemed to be making a success of his

freighting business. I had a few books of my own and sometimes borrowed one of Horace's. On many days I would take up a volume and walk down to the little creek—running at least some parts of the year—and lose myself reading Dickens or Smollett or *The Tempest* beneath our lovely sycamores. The hot spring up on the ridge was also a frequent destination. The brothers had covered it with sawn planks to keep it clear, and two or three times a week I would walk up the canyon, remove the planks and bathe. It was delightful, the water heated but not to the point of discomfort and smelling faintly of sulphur. Sometimes I would look up into the cloudless Arizona sky and see myself lying there naked, like some basking Susanna, and wonder what the other girls at Henniker would make of me now. I would think about the remoteness of where I was, how little in common it had with any other place I had ever seen. Las Sierras de Mulas. No one knew how the Mule Mountains had got their name. Some said it was because the steep-sided canyons provided natural holding pens for the thousands of mules that the Apache drove north from their raids in Sonora and Chihuahua. The Apache scorned the mule as a means of transportation or portage but valued it as a source of meat, the delicacy of its flesh highly prized. For myself, I decided that the name derived from the view of the two prominent mountains visible to me as I lay soaking in my mineral bath. From there I could see the twin peaks clearly, and they resembled nothing so much as the ears of a gigantic mule with myself stretched out upon a litter behind, Cleopatra on her barge.

But my society was not so narrow as perhaps I am making it seem. Horace had frequent occasion to travel into Tombstone on business, and sometimes I accompanied him. The Bisbee road had been improved by then so that the trip took no more than five hours and the ride a pleasant one. Tombstone was a large, bustling place with a population of several thousands, recently torn by a period of violence that had made its name synonymous with the lawless West. It was during one of my trips into Tombstone that I met Mr. Delaney.

He was standing in the Wells Fargo office on Allen Street speaking with Horace. The express office was located next to the Bird Cage Theatre and around the corner from the big Toughnut Mine and served as a center for the town's bustling business community. Seeing me in the doorway, Horace beckoned me in and introduced me to Mr. Delaney. He was a dark, handsome young man several years my elder and dressed in the costume of a 'cowboy'—which is to say flannel shirt, canvas breeches and tall boots—but polite and well spoken. Horace intimated that Mr. Delaney was a Pennsylvanian by birth—born in Scranton, he said—and I mentioned that I had seen much of Pennsylvania as I made my way west. Mr. Delaney responded that he had not been back to his native state for many years, having determined to explore the opportunities for advancement presented by this new western frontier. He had worked as a cowboy and a 'bronco-buster' and a guide for wagon trains in the Utah Territory. At present he was trying his hand prospecting in the Dragoon Mountains east of Benson.

On subsequent visits to Tombstone I had occasion to meet Mr. Delaney several times. Most of these encounters occurred at church, one of the few vestiges of my former life which I found myself missing. Church in Bisbee was a dismal affair held in an old miners' hall, but excitement was running high in Tombstone over the Episcopal church being constructed out on Safford Street. That would have been June 1882. It was a tidy little structure, built of stucco-covered adobe blocks in a style native to the desert Southwest—but with neo-Gothic touches like pointed window and door frames and a tall cross finial. The roofbeams had been hewn in the Chiricahua Mountains and dragged down by oxen, the stained-glass windows imported from Belgium and the oil lamps shipped all the way around Cape Horn. I found myself drawn to the place and attended services whenever I could. Several times Mr. Delaney found me there and joined me in what became our regular seats, near the back of the congregation. It

was all very proper. I smile now when I recall the irony of finding myself inadvertently compliant with that rule requiring that female teachers not keep company with young men save at official school or church functions! Afterwards sometimes we would walk out into the open land west of town where someone had fashioned a simple brush arbor—only a trellis of poles with overhanging ivy, really—in among a pretty stand of cottonwoods. Inside someone had constructed a rude bench out of odd scraps of lumber. It made a pleasant spot to visit. On our Sunday walks we would often pause there, with me seated on the bench and Mr. Delaney beside me or—more often than not—sprawled on the ground at my feet, the bench being neither spacious nor particularly comfortable. There Mr. Delaney—William—told me a great deal about himself. He was twenty-seven years of age and his family, now living in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was a prominent one. His older brother John had been a hero in the late war, a fact of which William was very proud but which had obviously cast a long shadow over his own life.

—It puts one in a difficult position, Mr. Delaney said with a rueful smile. John has made a wonderful success of things. At present he holds the position of senate librarian for the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Our father, you must understand, came over from Ireland during the potato famine with nothing but the clothes on his back. John went to work at age eight breaking coal. At ten he was leading mules along the Delaware Canal. At thirteen he was working in a tannery. When the war broke out, he enlisted, even though he was only fourteen. In 1862 he was in Maryland at the battle of Antietam. He was in the fighting along the sunken road that later became known as 'the Bloody Lane.' He described the scene to us many times. His regiment ran out of ammunition and was retreating across a cornfield when John noticed the regimental colors lying beneath a fallen soldier. The man had been shot through the body and was unable to lift himself. John scooped them both up, man and colors, and continued back toward the Union line with the Rebs advancing behind him at double-

time. He was almost to the fence when he was struck by a minié ball. It passed through his knee, toppling both himself and the wounded man he was carrying. The last thing he remembered before lapsing into unconsciousness was a big Irish sergeant leaping the rail fence and tossing them both over the fence like two sacks of grain. Later, while he was in a field hospital in Baltimore recuperating, President Lincoln himself came to visit. John said that Lincoln's face, already deeply lined, grew even graver when he learned that John was only fourteen. He said that he had a son of his own about that same age. John said that Mr. Lincoln promised to pray for him. When the war ended, John was seventeen and had risen to the rank of lieutenant.

—An inspiring story, I said.

Mr. Delaney had been chewing on the end of a dandelion weed, and here he stopped and tossed it away.

—Indeed, he said. But do you know what it is like being little brother to a war hero? To be raised in a household where those stories constituted 90% of the family history? 'Twenty-six battles, captured and escaped six times, saved the regimental colors at Antietam.' We would be at the table—John, myself and our brother Joshua—and it was as if only John were present. It almost felt as if—as if I were a ghost. There was no war for me to join when I turned sixteen, but when that time came I lit out too.

I was watching his face in profile, a dark face, saturnine, suffused a little now in passion.

—You came west at sixteen?

He glanced up at me.

—Not directly. I made a few stops in between. New Orleans, Memphis. In St. Louis I found a wagon train making up for California. A man offered to feed me in exchange for driving one of his teams. I walked beside those oxen every step of the way from St. Louis to Fresno, California. Took us six months. In California I did whatever work I could find. Panned for gold in a placer mine, roofed houses, worked in a

restaurant, hired out as a ranch hand. I turned twenty-one in Leadville, Colorado, working for Mr. Spicer. He took me out of the mines and gave me a real job. A chance, an opportunity.

—Mr. Spicer?

—Wells W. Spicer, attorney at law. Well, that was one of the hats he wore. He's been lawyer, judge, newspaper publisher, prospector, mine operator. He's here in Tombstone now, as territorial judge and justice of the peace.

—What sort of work did you do for him?

William shifted on his elbow and plucked up another weed.

—Well, he called me his man Friday. I was his court bailiff, did some process-serving. Was also, I suppose you could say, a sort of bodyguard. You see, Mr. Spicer had been appointed defense attorney for an accused murderer named John D. Lee. Lee was one of the Mormons who had massacred those folks at Mountain Meadows back in the 1850s—the Fancher party, from Arkansas. Disguised themselves as Paiute Indians. Folks were stirred up pretty good once the truth got out. Mormons wanted Lee executed—scapegoated, so that none of the other guilty parties could be brought in. Non-Mormons wanted him kept alive, claiming that Lee knew a lot more than he was letting on about the Mormons' secret plans in the Territory. Mr. Spicer was receiving threats from all sides. The press had him nailed up like Christ on the cross—

He stopped.

—Excuse me, Octavia.

—For what? I said. A simple, innocent simile, not even an oath? We are not taking tea in the chaplain's parlor at The Henniker School.

He looked up blankly. Then he smiled.

—No, he said. No, I suppose not.

—Pray continue, I said.

—Well, he said. Nothing really came of it. The all-Mormon jury found John D. Lee guilty, and the judge gave him a choice: beheaded, hanged or shot. He chose being shot, and so they took him back to Mountain Meadows, the scene of the

crime, where he was executed by firing squad. To simplify matters they had him sit on the edge of his coffin before an open grave, so the burial practically took care of itself. All they had to do was close the lid on him and throw in some dirt. I do remember his last words, however, which were 'I have been sacrificed in a cowardly, dastardly manner.' After it was over, Mr. Spicer turned to me and said, 'Well, Billy, I suppose this makes you and me among the last participants in this sorry spectacle.' He pulled out shortly thereafter. A couple of years later when I heard from him he was in Tombstone and writing to let me know I should come join him, and quickly, if I wished to make my fortune.

Here William paused, smiling.

—I told him 'Tombstone' didn't have all that appealing a ring to it. But Mr. Spicer had his mind made up. There was silver in these mountains, he said, great lodes of it. He had the fever. But of course instead of striking it rich he landed himself right in the middle of another jackpot. They seem to follow him around like a pack of friendly hounds.

It was a brilliant Sunday noon that day under the cottonwoods. I marveled once again, as I had since my arrival, at the purity of the air. For long stretches we were content to sit in silence, enjoying the peace and serenity of the place. From time to time the smell of vanilla came to me, which I now had learned was a fragrance associated with a species of acacia that grows there in great abundance.

—What were the Mormons like? I finally said. I have heard that they are a strange, clannish people.

William shrugged.

—A lot like other folks, in my experience.

He laughed.

—Except for the fact that Elder John D. Lee had something like nineteen wives and fifty-six children. But no, folks make a mistake in thinking the Mormons are not a diligent, upright, independent people. That's why they picked the part of the country to settle in that they did. They wanted

a place where they would be left alone and as far as possible from corruption and vice. They don't tolerate alcohol, tobacco or any sort of licentiousness. For them it was no pushing on for California or Oregon, any of those so-called paradises. All they wanted was a place where they could keep to themselves, practice their religion and not have others interfere. They are self-sufficient wherever they go. Every settlement has its own sawmill, tannery, saddle maker, carpentry shop, cotton gin, gunsmith. Ready to defend themselves, too, and good fighters when necessary. In that lead mine we were operating, they were buying up every ounce of the stuff as fast as we could get it above ground. They needed it for bullets.

—How remarkable that you should have spent time among them, I said. Back east they are cast as great villains, you know. A superstitious, depraved, treasonous people. A cult trafficking in wickedness and delusion—and most of all, despite what you say, terrible libertines. Why, I remember—

Here I paused in embarrassment, but then I forced myself on.

—I remember the very man you saw executed, John D. Lee, as depicted on stage back in Bridgeport. In Mr. Cody's melodrama *May Cody Lost and Won*, he appeared as a member of a secret cadre of Mormon assassins known as the Danites. In the play John D. Lee had abducted May Cody with the intention of having her join Brigham Young's…Brigham Young's seraglio. Buffalo Bill, disguised as White Wolf, arrived at Brigham Young's temple just in the nick of time. That temple…with the smoke and the drums throbbing and Brigham Young observing all from high upon his throne. It made for a most sinister and unsettling scene. It seemed so…Oriental.

I felt myself blushing.

—How silly that that is all I should know of the West—that and other things similarly inane. A make-believe world created for the credulous and naïve.

We did not speak for a while, and I had my eyes cast down but when I raised them again I saw that he was looking up at me.

—I should like to see the Buffalo Bill show, he said very gently. I imagine it would be extremely entertaining.

After that we sat for a time longer enjoying the Sunday stillness. A few other strollers were about but not many, and as usual we had this particular spot to ourselves. Finally, I found occasion to speak again.

—You said that after you had joined Mr. Spicer in Tombstone he found himself in another 'jackpot.' Was that the word? What was the difficulty?

He looked up briefly, then back down again.

—The Earps and the Cowboys. Cochise County Cowboys, they were called

—I think I heard something about that. It was shortly after I had arrived. What happened?

William shrugged.

—Family feud mostly. The Earps on one side, Clantons on the other. Earps shot up the Cowboys pretty good—killed three, Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers—but that day they happened to be the ones wearing the badges. Mr. Spicer couldn't find any cause to indict, so the Cowboys handled it their own way. Still going on, only now it's their side with the badges and the Earps on the run. Out here it can seem pretty hard to tell how the law is supposed to work, or even if there is such a thing. Mostly it's whatever the market will bear. In Clifton, for example, the owner of the Chase Creek Saloon is also town sheriff. Legal Eagle and Viceroy of Vice blended into one. And that is far from uncommon. True of the Earps, for example. The law is whoever swings the biggest stick.

William shook his head.

—Anyway, I suppose the Earp thing means it's time for Mr. Spicer to be pulling out again. He seems to have a way of getting himself into these pickles but also a talent for sliding himself out.

William had been reclining on the grass with one elbow beneath him, but now he drew himself upright into a sitting position. He clasped his arms about his knees and looked up at me.

—Again I must beg your pardon, Octavia. All this talk of murder and saloons and gunplay. Being out in this country for so long, outside the presence of respectable company, has a coarsening effect upon a man. I forget how inappropriate my manners—and my language—can be.

There was something so vulnerable in his voice, and I leaned forward to touch his arm.

—Please do not concern yourself, William. Since I have been in this country, I too have found it necessary to shift my behavior in order to meet new circumstances. For myself, I have not found that to be an unhealthy thing. It seems an opportunity for growth into a different version of oneself. A better version, I am inclined to think. Besides, I have found that convention and respectability are often mere shells beneath which lurks a different reality entirely.

Octavia had just poured out Mrs. Fairbairn's cup of tea when she saw the Apache standing in the doorway. He was squat and barrel-chested and bow-legged and no taller than she was, dressed in a combination of hide leggings, breechcloth and faded flannel shirt. He was carrying a short-barreled rifle, and he had a knife in a buckskin sheath on his belt. The man began moving slowly along the wall, taking in the cabin's furnishings, and as he did a second Apache came silently through the door and then a third and a fourth. Octavia heard a gasp from beside her, and she looked over quickly toward her guests. Ida Fairbairn, wife to Bisbee's new preacher, had come out that morning to visit, bringing along her infant child and her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law lived in Springfield, Illinois, where her husband was rector of Grace Lutheran Church. Now the two women sat transfixed, holding their little incongruous teacups to their chests. One of the Apaches

turned and said something to the last man to come through the door. It was a short, guttural utterance—incapable, it seemed to her, of communicating any rational message. The man in the doorway turned and stepped back outside. She could hear him speaking to someone, a single phrase not even resembling a sequence of words. She could hear the two Ralston horses in the corral nickering.

Octavia slowly set her cup and saucer aside but remained sitting, watching them. Then, to her surprise, Ida Fairbairn reached into the wooden box they had been using as a crib and produced her baby. Smiling, she held it up for the Apaches to see as if she were at some distant gathering of family introducing the child for the first time. It was a gesture, Octavia assumed, intended to promote trust and friendship but in her own mind sending the wrong message entirely. To her it seemed a statement of helplessness and vulnerability, almost an invitation to aggression. The elder Mrs. Fairbairn was sitting stock-still in her chair, her teacup halfway to her lips, posed like a statue or a figure in an antique painting of a parlor scene.

The brave who had entered the room first had been standing by the fireplace, but now he came walking slowly toward Octavia, his head cocked like a cat. As he approached, she caught his smell. It was the smell of woodsmoke and prairie sage and some sort of grease or oil—the smell, she thought, of a wild animal, of someone who lived outdoors. He arrived before her and stopped, his nostrils distended as if he were taking in her scent as well. Their eyes were on almost exactly the same level. His face was a burnished copper brown, the hair spilling out from his red headcloth black and coarse. He had a pointed chin and sharp cheekbones and, she now noted, a slight cast in his left eye that made it appear as if he were looking past her.

Standing there in silence, she had the impression of being in the presence of something utterly alien. With another pang of embarrassment she recalled her callow acquiescence

watching the beaded and feathered 'redskins' enact their charade of savagery on the stage of the Bijou Theatre in Bridgeport. Storybook Indians, nothing more, like the Turks and the corsairs and the wild man of Borneo. This was something else. The man's eyes were lustrous and black and contained in them a history that she knew immediately was beyond her comprehension. Beyond her imagining even. He stood holding her eyes with his, then suddenly thrust back his head and let out a series of high-pitched yips and trills. Animal sounds, perhaps, or something designedly unearthly, a visitation of nightmare intended to strike fear into one's adversary. Strangely, however, she did not feel afraid. There was something in the performance that seemed calculated, that made it ring hollow. It occurred to her that she was perhaps misreading this scene as well, but she held firm to her initial impression that he wished to see her prostrated by fear. Why allow one's wits to become uncottered by a shriek?

Nor did she flinch when he moved on to what she knew must be the next indignity: suffering his touch upon her. She watched as he turned and stood his carbine up against the wall behind him. Then he stepped forward and thrust a hand deep into the thickness of her hair. Pulling her head down to the side, he made a dramatic show of unsheathing his belt knife. Beside her she heard the other two women groan. Although she deeply resented this violation of her person, she considered again its probable purpose—that he might receive gratification from seeing her terrorized—and so she grew intent upon denying him this satisfaction. She had known few real moments of fear in her life, but she knew that the experience required the participation of the victim, and so she held her eyes resolutely upon the highest point of him now visible, a bone amulet strung on a leather thong hanging from his neck. Even constrained in this manner, a sort of calmness came over her, a composure she maintained as the Apache proceeded through other acts of intimidation—snarling, yipping, pulling at her hair. It seemed a series of taunts such as a schoolyard bully might direct toward some younger child, and she was

determined to have none of it. Instead, she kept her eyes intently focused upon the savage's amulet, silent, defiant.

And, sure enough, the buck's attention seemed to wander. The grip of his hand in her hair loosened. He leaned over to look at the tea service, at the little plate of biscuits on the upturned flour cask. This respite allowed Octavia the opportunity to reorient herself. The other Apaches were poking idly around the room, looking at this and that. One picked up the mantel clock, then set it down again. Another was looking into the stove. But then she noticed that in the far corner of the room one of the men had her trunk open and was going through its contents. He was turning up her dresses, her undergarments. He lifted out a packet of photographs and held them up for the others to see. It was this transgression that galvanized her into action. She wrenched herself free of her captor's grasp, sprang from her chair and rushed toward the man at the trunk, who was now holding a photograph up close to his face, examining it. In the next moment, before he was aware, she had snatched it from his hand and dealt him a two-handed shove to the chest that sent him reeling backwards a step or two. At this the other braves broke out in raucous laughter. Octavia tossed the packet with the loose photograph back into the trunk, lowered the lid, turned the key and dropped the key down the front of her dress.

—He can find it there, you know, she heard Ida Fairbairn say from behind her in a strange, warbling voice.

Octavia looked at her. She was still sitting in her chair, a fixed smile on her face, still holding her baby up like a sort of talisman. It occurred to Octavia that the baby was also perhaps intended to establish Ida's identity as its mother, thus exempting her from whatever outrages the savages might have in mind for the rest of the company. For Octavia's part, she remained skeptical that the Apache would hold the institution of motherhood in anything like the same high regard that Ida Fairbairn did.

—Dear God, Ida said, hissing sotto voce out of the corner of her mouth like a stage ventriloquist. Do not provoke them further.

But in truth the Apache continued to ignore both her as well as her mother-in-law, who still sat as if absolute motionlessness might render her invisible. They made one final slow circuit of the room, poking into this and that. One picked up the sugar bowl and emptied its contents into his mouth. One pocketed a needle and a thimble, some thread. When they reached the doorway, they paused, taking a final look around. Then before exiting, almost ceremoniously, one after the other raised his breechcloth in the women's direction, exposing his private parts, front and rear. At this Ida Fairbairn uttered a little cry and turned her head away, while using her free hand to shield the eyes of her baby. The brave who had entered first lingered for a moment longer in the doorway. He caught Octavia's eye and held it. He laid his hand upon his breast and spoke very slowly.

—Bonito. Me llamo.

He touched his breast again where his amulet was.

—Mi esposa muerta.

He stood looking about the room.

—Hermosa. Se llama.

He stood silent for a few moments then, his lips moving as if searching for a word or attempting to articulate a difficult sound.

—Mar-e-ha-bay-ker, he finally said.

Placing his carbine beneath his arm, he raised his right fist before him and brought his open left hand down atop it. Then he turned and stepped through the door and was gone. The three women held their places for a while. Ida's baby had begun to fret, and she took it to her breast. Her mother-in-law's teacup had begun to shake, and she lowered it into her lap. Finally, Octavia went to the door to look. Mrs. Fairbairn's buckboard stood as before in the dusty sunshine, the horses tethered to the post. The Ralstons' two horses were still inside

the stone corral, both looking down the canyon to the south, in the direction the Apaches must have gone.

Octavia was telling all this to William Delaney as they sat in the brush arbor out Safford Street in Tombstone. Now, in the new year, the little Episcopal church had been in operation for over six months, and although many things in Tombstone remained the same, others were changing. There were still a dozen restaurants, an icehouse, three newspapers, three banks, an opera house. But water had been encountered in the Sulphuret at 520 feet and shortly thereafter in the Toughnut and the Grand Central mines as well. Pumping operations had commenced, but this new development did not bode well. The prospect of continually having to pump down the water table to recover silver of an ever-declining grade was problematic. The razor-thin line between boom and bust was something well understood in this part of the world. The desert was full of once prosperous mining towns that had gone under—La Paz, Mowry, Shakespeare, Castle Dome—their crumbling brick and blanched wooden façades all that remained of those hopes and dreams.

—Chiricahua Apache, it sounds like, Delaney said. Probably off the reservation at San Carlos. They keep them pretty well penned up there but periodically they allow them to check out guns and ammunition and go out on hunting parties like in the old days. They may get a little frisky, pretending to be the people they once were. Sounds to me like that was the kind of visit you received. Likely just funning, reliving old times. Biggest disappointment was probably not finding any whiskey about the place. Still, it's certainly not entirely safe for you to be out there all alone, with the brothers off all day at the mine.

—Perhaps not, she said. But the truth is that for some reason I felt no fear.

As was his custom Delaney was lying on the ground at her feet. He raised his head, lifting a hand to shield his eyes from the sun. He was smiling.

—Why doesn't that surprise me?

—It was strange, though. The Apache leader, before he left I felt that he was trying to tell me something. He had some Spanish. I believe he was telling me his name—Bonito, I think he said. Do you know who that is?

—No, I don't think so.

—Then he began sounding out some words, in English I think. I wonder what they were?

—Couldn't say, he said. We used to have some Apache come around out on the ranch with strings of ponies they wanted to trade. Most of them speak some Spanish, not so sure about the English.

They sat for a while watching the thunderheads build over the Dragoon Mountains, seven miles to the east.

—And what of you, William Delaney? she said. I believe you mentioned that the bloom had come off the prospecting life. Are there responsibilities here in Tombstone that hold you, perhaps working for Mr. Spicer again? Forgive me if I am prying.

—Of course not, Octavia. No, Mr. Spicer has caught the prospecting fever again. He's thinking of shoving for the Quijotoas out west of Tucson, maybe try Sonora down in Old Mexico, where he has friends. But that strike-it-rich dream holds no appeal for me, not anymore. I am tired of the wandering life. I seem to have spent most of the last two years trailing back and forth between Tombstone and Clifton. Back and forth like a rootless desert tumbleweed.

—Clifton? she said.

This time he did not look up.

—It's a town up north, he said. In Graham County, along the New Mexico border. Not much of a town, not much bigger than Bisbee.

—What took you there?

—This and that. I have a friend who has a freight-hauling business.

There was a pause.

—Clifton's a different kind of place. I've seen others like it—Leadville, Tombstone, Silver City, Globe, Contention—all out of the way, dusty places that just happen to be sitting on top of some vein of precious mineral. Mr. Spicer says that gold and silver are always found in the most barren, inhospitable regions. Got to be that way to make sure a man is deserving of his reward.

Delaney smiled.

—He usually adds that it remains uncertain whether this is God's handiwork or the other fellow's, intended to double-seal his damnation. In any event, such places tend to draw a special breed of men. First comers are the prospectors and miners and sutlers. Then the jackals who prey upon them. Gamblers, thieves, confidence men, whores. Leadville was bad enough, but Clifton is worse. It is the crown jewel, you might say, the mecca of sin. You can walk through Eastside and meet any manner of vice you can name—and some that have no names. It is just the sort of place Satan might set down to ensnare human souls, like hanging a strip of molasses flypaper in a butcher shop. Men at the gambling tables, night and day. Rivers of whiskey. Shootings and stabbings a daily occurrence. The Richelieu, the Blue Goose, the Gem, the Midway—all lined up along Conglomerate Avenue and all aglitter like steamboats on the Mississippi. A drink never sells for less than a quarter, and money flows like water. At Hovey's—Hovey is the sheriff I was telling you about—twenty dancing girls work every night until sun-up.

Delaney paused in an apparent effort to collect himself. His color had risen, and the marks of strong feeling were on his face. When he began again, his voice was lower.

—The whole town is under the thumb of someone named Kid Lewis. He is the chief resident demon of the place—its Beelzebub. Hasn't turned twenty yet, hair down to the middle

of his back, forever drunk and laughing and carrying on. He and his gang run the town. They drink and gamble until they run out of money, then they go out and rob to get more. While I was there the Kid shot a woman, a dance-hall girl with whom he was keeping company, and when the company doctor refused to come tend to her, the Kid rode over and shot him too. That's the kind of place it is. You can almost smell the brimstone in the air. Satan puts whiskey in men's mouths to rob them of their wits, pits them one against the other like wild animals. Makes them brutes to women. Causes women to fling away their honor and trample it underfoot as something of no worth.

There was another long hesitation.

—Pardon me for going on so. I must sound like a Baptist tent preacher.

—No, she said. I value the fact that you would confide in me so unreservedly. That you would not wish to shield me from a true knowledge of the world. But, William, forgive me for asking. If this Clifton is such a wicked place, why do you go there? Is the business that takes you there so pressing?

He glanced up at her, a sad smile on his face.

—An age-old story, is it not? A young man must venture into the forest to try himself against the Wicked One. I suppose it is what they call a rite of passage. But there is something more. For some men a place like Clifton offers a sort of freedom, which is the thing they most desire. An opportunity to try out the boldest versions of themselves. See themselves as they really are. Live along the razor's edge.

Now it was her turn to pause.

—I think I know what you mean. Though perhaps for women that chance at freedom—that trying out of the self—is not so fraught with violence. Every society, it seems, requires that their young men go off to war. As you say, it is a rite of passage. As with your brother. Clifton sounds similar.

He was still looking at her.

—Like John going off to war?

—Yes, she said gently. Who was afforded that opportunity, the ultimate arena of violence and savagery to prove himself. I cannot see much difference between that and your Clifton, unless one falls back upon the old canard of country and flag, which in this case I would be loath to do. Not in such a hideous war, one that divided families and pitted neighbor against neighbor. It seems more a facsimile of war's invention, when angels took up arms against one another on the plains of heaven and Satan conceived gunpowder to mark the occasion. Or so Mr. Milton has it.

—Ah, he said. I had not thought to make the connection. With John, that is.

Now he dropped his eyes again.

—In any case, I had to get away. I had some trouble there. I hope never to return.

The thunderhead was now over the peaks of the Dragoons, flattened and dark like an eiderdown blanket slowly descending. A breath of cool wind stirred the desert floor. Their arbor was a good quarter mile from the town proper, and should they be caught out in one of those sudden late summer monsoons they would be in for a drenching. Delaney began to rise but Octavia reached out and put a hand upon his shoulder.

She knew about monsoons all right, from her time in the Mule Mountains. She liked watching them build. First the white clouds in the southeast began rising into towering, cathedral-like thunderheads, livid and dangerous-looking. Then the light began to fail, growing dim and eerie and green like the dimming in a theater before a performance. From overhead a low rumbling, with panels of sheet lightning visible behind the clouds and the air pungent with the smell of ozone and discharged electricity. Then the detonation, like being in the cannon's mouth, peal after peal of thunder at such terrible, ever-increasing volume that the earth was set a-tremble. The temperature plummeting, the air transformed in seconds from hot to chill. Lightning striking all around, long jagged bolts of

it falling to earth. The desert animals—jackrabbit and armadillo and javelina—breaking cover, put to rout by the chaos. And then finally the release—great dollops of rain pounding down with such force that they rebounded high off the earth to fall a second time. It was as if the cosmos was presenting a re-enactment of its own violent self-creation, a release of the fierce powers forever present at its core. But then, usually within the matter of only a few minutes, followed by a perfect calm, with the desert left shimmering blue and cool and aromatic.

—Pah, she said. Who cares about getting a little damp? Before we go, I want to ask you something. Please do not think me forward, but what would you say to joining us in the Mule Mountains? The brothers Ralston would welcome another good hand, and they make for congenial, easy company. The mine is yielding wonderfully. Our copper is of a very high grade and there is some silver as well. We are still hopeful that some gold may turn up. I do not know the particulars, but I understand that the precious metals are very commonly found in close proximity to one another. The brothers are in continual communication with Mr. Tappenier, the assayer in Bisbee, who is also a trained geologist.

Delaney rose to his feet and came to stand over her. He extended his hand.

—A most generous offer, Octavia. Let me think upon it. In the meantime we should get ourselves under cover before this little squall arrives.

William Delaney did join the Ralston brothers at their mine, and he did indeed prove a good hand. He had mined before. He helped push out the carts once they were filled, and he helped sort the ore and load it onto the wagon for Bisbee. He spoke of his brother John, who had begun working in the coal mines at age eight, and how that experience played an important role in the life story that followed.

He slept in the stone cottage with the brothers. She fed the three men in her own cabin before they walked up to the mine in the morning and again when they returned in the evening. It seemed an unlikely life when she thought about it but also one that was strange and wonderful. Her days were still her own, and she found herself moving through each one in perfect contentment. She thought often of the firecat she had seen. Although it did not reappear, she knew it was there. She thought of it as the totem spirit of the place, her attendant deity, her equivalent of 'Let there be light.' William was occasionally still away. She did not inquire, knowing that he retained connections in Tombstone and beyond. After one of his junkets he returned with news that Wells Spicer had sent word of a rich silver strike on Mount Ben Nevis west of Tucson, calling it 'the Comstock of Arizona'—which led Delaney only to reiterate his own resolve not to return to that life. The brothers too were sometimes gone, to Bisbee, conferring with the assayer Mr. Tappenier. Through him they had entered into an arrangement to have their ore processed at the Copper Queen smelter in Bisbee.

In October she read in a Tombstone paper of the death of James 'Kid' Lewis, age twenty. A native of Missouri, Lewis was said to be a suspect in several murders in Graham County and a ringleader in the 'reign of terror' that had recently gripped that community. He had met his end in a nighttime shootout in a remote canyon 'at the hands of parties unknown.' She did not mention this matter to William, not knowing what effect such news might have upon him.

A final series of chubascos swept through the valley, signaling the passing of the season. As always, she welcomed these storms and the coolness that followed. She loved the smell of the humble greasewoods—creosote bushes, the locals called them—which grew in concentric rings over spans of hundreds of years and after rains left the desert with a faintly antiseptic smell. More and more she had been thinking that she should name this place, this particular canyon, naming

being in effect a second act of creation. The Mule Mountains no longer seemed to suffice, that being the designation of a general vicinity which included the town of Bisbee. The name she had been thinking of for her own little valley was La Querencia. She had come upon this word in a volume of *Don Quixote* which she had borrowed from the little Copper Queen library with the aim of improving her Spanish. In a passage early in the book, Don Quixote had put his horse Rocinante back upon the road toward home, at which point the animal—sensing his beloved stable as their likely destination—'had begun walking so briskly that his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground.' *El cual, casi conociendo la querencia, con tanta gana comenzó a caminar*. Only the word querencia was not Spanish for stable. It suggested something more, something for which there was perhaps no English equivalent. She thought about it. The Latin verb, she remembered from her Henniker days, was *quaerere*: to seek. La querencia—the place one sought. A place where one felt strong and safe. A place from which one's power was drawn. La Querencia.

It was upon one of these perfect late season days with the brothers away in Bisbee that Octavia took her Quixote and began making her way up to the hot spring. She was walking with her head down, picking her way up the rocky slope, and she was almost at the spring before she saw Delaney. He was sitting in the water, leaning back with his eyes closed and his head tilted back on the stone lip of the spring. The first thing she noticed was the whiteness of his flesh, his chest and shoulders such a contrast with the deep brown of his neck and face, almost like parts of two separate bodies joined together. She noted too the crosshatching of welts and scars imprinted upon his body, like a mapping of his travels. For a moment she paused, not wishing to intrude, but then Delaney turned his head and opened his eyes. His expression was sleepy and blank, but then, seeing her there, crossed by a sudden look of alarm. He managed a quick glance in the direction of his clothes, which were spread over a nearby creosote bush to dry,

but understanding his dilemma, let himself sink back even more deeply into the spring.

—Octavia—

But then he said nothing more because after only a moment's hesitation Octavia had continued to walk up the track toward him, smiling slightly and unfastening the top buttons of her dress.

—The famous public baths of Rome were communal, you know. Frequented by both men and women.

He did not turn his head or open his eyes.

—Really, he said.

—Yes. Not in the early days, of course, but after Augustus became emperor during the Pax Romana. During that period many of the old ways of thinking fell away, and the social barriers separating the sexes were relaxed. Women were able to move freely in society and share its benefits equally with men, including the use of the public baths. It is all right there in Ovid and Pliny and Martial. Those were the empire's glory days. For women it was a time of liberation previously unknown—and, sadly, never again realized. Not once the Christian emperors got in—Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius and that lot. Still, as Augustus' adoptive father once observed, the die had been cast. An idea, once alive, never dies, however relentlessly it may be attacked and repressed. And the great revelation here is that a true civilization is not defined just by military might but by social equality as well.

Still Delaney did not open his eyes.

—You should have been a teacher, he said.

This remark was followed by a long period of silence—so lengthy, in fact, that Delaney finally thought to turn his head and glance in her direction. She was lying level in the water looking at him.

—You think so? she said. Look at me.

He did.

—Do I look like the village schoolmarm to you?

—No, I guess not.

It was a drowsy early afternoon, the sky a perfect slate gray and very high above the mesa. She looked over at the pile of clothing she had set down beside his, hers with the Quixote on top. La Querencia. Some further minutes passed in silence. Down the hill a bird had started up, a cactus wren she thought, a char-char-char gradually ascending in volume.

—I would like to call you Ella, he finally said.

She smiled.

—Really? Why?

—I would like to imagine you as a girl. Growing up. Making the decision to pick up and come out here on your own. Not knowing what you would find.

He settled himself more deeply into the water.

—And myself as well. Imagined as a boy, with our futures still unmade. Before we met one another.

She looked over at him but his eyes were closed.

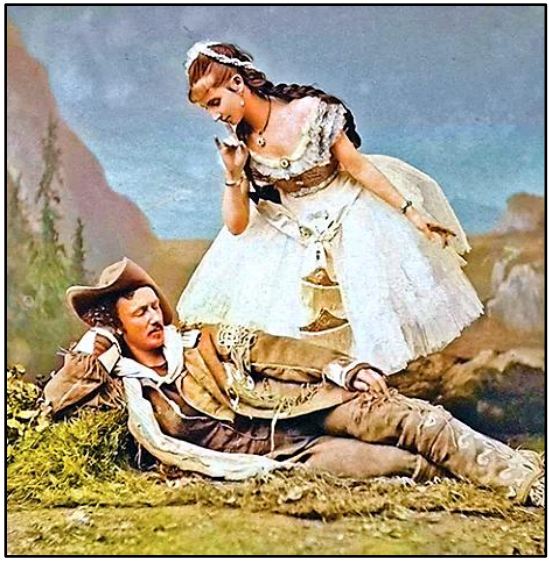
—Ella as a diminutive of Octavia? That seems most irregular. In fact, my father gave me the name Octavia—after Mark Antony's dutiful wife, you will recall, a paragon of Roman virtue—precisely to discourage such vile diminutives. No Becky nor Abbie nor Susie for me. It is by such naming that fathers set their daughters out upon their presumed life's journey, I suppose.

Delaney stirred in the bath, let his head dip back beneath the surface, raised it again. She looked at him, the head of coal black hair plastered onto his skull thick as a helmet. Seeing his face in this way with his eyes closed gave it a primal look, like something fresh minted by a sculptor out of stone. He resembled an exotic sea-creature, a merman, an unidentifiable figure one might find inscribed upon an Etruscan vase or coin. She felt as if she were seeing him for the first time. It was a face that seemed right for his body, suggesting as it did a stoic mastery of the forces that had striped and scarred it.

—Ella, she said. I hope you are not considering re-naming me after some former sweetheart that you loved and lost.

—No. I am afraid I missed out on all of that too.

—Ella, she said, leaning back with the smoking water riding about her ears. I like it.



2. The Bisbee Massacre

The smaller man was firing up the street and the large man down, toward the Copper Queen smelter. The large man must have been the one who killed Tom Smith, the smaller one Johnny Tappenier. The two shooters had ridden into town with three other men around 7:30 PM on a Saturday night, December 8, 1883. It was a cold evening. They were all wearing canvas trousers, tall boots and long overcoats. They left their horses tied at Preston's Lumberyard on the east side of town and walked together up Main Street. Outside the Castaneda store they stopped, drawing kerchiefs up around their faces. Two of the men stepped through the door, pistols drawn, while a third paused to collect two pedestrians who happened to be approaching on the street. Once inside, the bandits confronted the store clerk—a man named Peter Doll—demanding that he open the safe. Payday for the miners fell on the tenth day of each month, and it was a well-known fact that the payroll arrived a few days earlier and was kept in the Castaneda store safe, Bisbee having no bank. Not knowing the combination, Peter Doll could not comply with the bandits' demands but one of the store's co-owners, Joe Goldwater, who was also present, did. He knelt and worked the combination until he was able to swing the safe door open and begin pulling out sheafs of bills, which he deposited in a sack one of the robbers was holding open. As he unloaded the safe, Goldwater attempted to lighten the moment by asking what other merchandise he might show the gentlemen, mentioning particularly the store's fine assortment of overcoats, very suitable for the current weather. In response, one of the robbers thrust a pistol in his face, saying 'Empty the safe, you one-eyed sheeney bastard, and be quick about it.' Inside the safe, besides the loose cash and some jewelry, were two fancy gold watches. A cigar box full of Mexican currency dropped onto the floor, and they took that too.

Meanwhile, there was shooting outside. It had begun as John C. Tappenier, an assayer for the Copper Queen Mining Company, and his friend Joe Bright were exiting the Bon Ton Saloon, just one door down from the Castaneda store. The small man, standing back-to-back with his taller companion, had ordered the two men back inside the saloon. Not understanding the demand and thinking perhaps it was offered in jest, Tappenier had replied in kind, and the small man had raised his Winchester and shot him in the head, blowing a portion of his brains out onto the boardwalk behind him. The stricken man had managed to turn and take one step back toward the Bon Ton before collapsing in the doorway. Now both shooters, the large and the small, began firing up and down the street at any target that presented itself.

By this time the robbers inside the store had emptied the safe. The mining company payroll, however, was not there. Unbeknown to them, it was still en route from Tombstone and was not due to arrive until later that evening. One of the men went into the back room where the store's co-owner José Castaneda lay in bed crippled with arthritis. The robber demanded that Castaneda reveal where the other store monies were kept. Castaneda refused but the robber made him sit up and beneath his pillow discovered a purse containing $700 in gold coins, which he thrust into the pocket of his coat.

D.T. 'Tom' Smith had only been a deputy sheriff for a few days. He was eating dinner with his wife in Sima's Restaurant directly across the street from the Castaneda store when the shooting started. A former stage driver, Smith's nickname was 'Pick Handle Tom,' a reference to his sidearm of choice—effective at close quarters and unlikely to cause an escalation of violence. On this occasion, however, he had armed himself with a snub-nosed British Bulldog pistol, which he was carrying in his coat pocket. Hearing the disturbance, he dropped his napkin onto his plate and walked out into the street, identifying himself as a peace officer. 'You're the one we want then,' one of the bandits was heard to call out, 'for we

are the Cochise County Cowboys.' Both men then turned their fire on him, wounding him twice in the body before a third bullet struck him in the forehead, killing him. His body fell into the street beneath the shafts of a delivery wagon, his pistol still in his pocket.

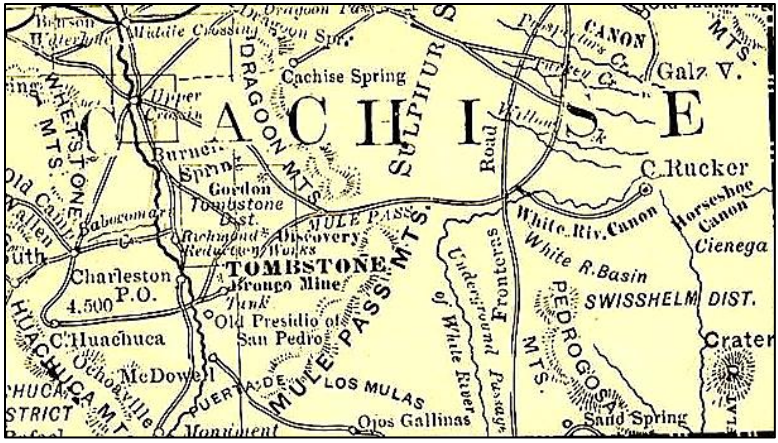
The shooters then began firing upon any other person who showed himself. A hostler known as Indian Joe was shot in the leg as he turned to flee. James Nolly, a local freighter also out in the street with his mule team, sustained a Winchester wound to the chest at a range of perhaps forty yards and fell, severely wounded. All this gunfire brought Mrs. Annie Roberts, eight-months pregnant, to the door of her boarding house just up the street, and the smaller man, seeing perhaps only her profile backlighted in the doorway, raised his weapon and fired. The bullet passed through Mrs. Roberts' abdomen, severing her spine and killing her unborn child. She would linger for a few hours before dying later that night.

Inside the store the three robbers were wrapping things up. The safe's contents had been added to Castaneda's cache of gold coins and the store's customers relieved of their valuables. Although four of the robbers were wearing masks, one was not. The man who had gone into the back room to stand over José Castaneda and who was evidently the leader of the gang was known in Bisbee and recognized as one James 'Tex' Howard. A second man, whose mask was displaced during the holdup, was recognized as Daniel 'York' Kelly. Their business concluded, the three men inside the bank emerged to join the two shooters outside. By now the volume of return fire had increased. Deputy Sheriff Billy Daniels had been playing billiards in his saloon, and he emerged from the back door and emptied his revolver in the robbers' direction. A miner named James Krigbaum had taken a position at the east end of Main Street and was firing his weapon over a low stone wall. One of his shots creased the back of the big shooter's canvas coat, but that was the extent of the damage. The five robbers came ducking and weaving their way down the street, retrieved their horses from Preston's Lumberyard

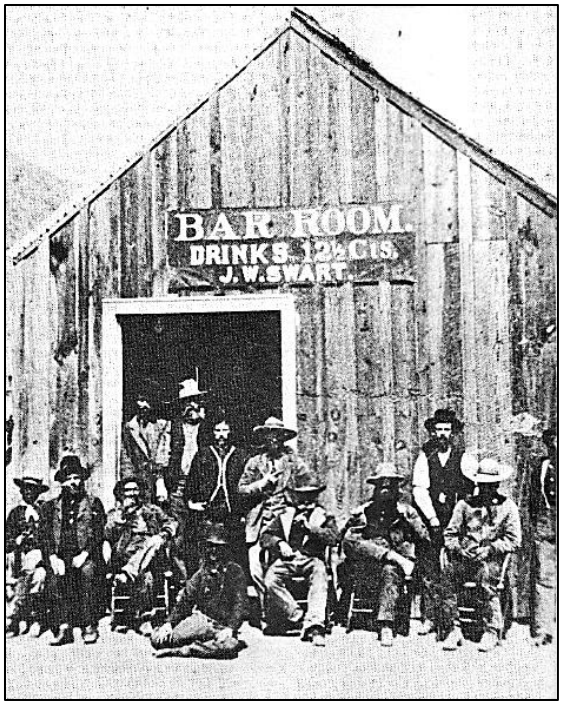
and went riding off up Main Street, firing their revolvers into the air and at any bystanders who happened to show themselves. The entire affair was a matter of only twenty or twenty-five minutes.

With the bandits gone, attention in Bisbee turned to the wounded. James Nolly was taken into Sol Pierce's saloon and a doctor summoned, but he died the next day. James Kriegbaum volunteered to ride to Tombstone in the hope of bringing back a priest for Annie Roberts, a devout Catholic. Provided with a fast horse by the woman's husband, he rode hard over the rough freight road, shaving six miles off the twenty-six-mile trip by taking two dangerous short cuts. Along the way he passed the stagecoach inbound with the Copper Queen payroll.

As for the robbers, they rode east for several miles before turning north for Soldiers' Hole and the Dragoon Mountains. A witness who encountered them on the road around nine o'clock that evening described them as being in a festive mood, passing a bottle back and forth, and joking about which members of their company would soon be sporting fancy gold watches.



3. Charleston, Arizona Territory



The four men sat drinking at a table in J. W. Stwart's bar room in Charleston, Arizona Territory. It was Thanksgiving Day, 1883, and Jacob Stwart had already called the house to order and had Joe Hill mount a chair to read the Thanksgiving Proclamation from President Arthur. He had chosen Joe Hill on the basis of his reading skills, his declamatory power and his patriotic fervor. Among Stwart's clientele Joe Hill's rendition of 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' was frequently called for. When the room had quieted, Joe Hill lifted the previous day's edition of the *Tombstone Republican* and began.

—'In furtherance of the custom of this people at the closing of each year to engage, upon a day set apart for that purpose, in a special festival of praise to the Giver of All Good,

I, Chester A. Arthur, President of the United States, do hereby designate Thursday, the 29th day of November next, as a day of national thanksgiving. The year which is drawing to an end has been replete with evidences of divine goodness. The prevalence of health, the fullness of the harvests, the stability of peace and order, the growth of fraternal feeling, the spread of intelligence and learning, the continued enjoyment of civil and religious liberty—all these and countless other blessings are cause for reverent rejoicing. I do therefore recommend that on the day above appointed the people rest from their accustomed labors and, meeting in their several places of worship, express their devout gratitude to God that He hath dealt so bountifully with this nation and pray that His grace and favor abide with it forever. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the city of Washington, this 26th day of October, A.D. 1883, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and eighth. Signed, Chester A. Arthur, President.'

The conclusion of Joe Hill's reading was met with thunderous applause, a pounding of tables and a general stamping of boots. With a modest wave to the crowd Joe stepped down off his chair. The Fourth of July prompted the biggest celebrations in Cochise County, with whole steers roasted and barrels of whiskey tapped, but Thanksgiving came a close second. The town of Charleston was located some nine miles southwest of Tombstone, just across the San Pedro River from the town of Millville. It was to Millville that the ore from the Tombstone mines was hauled to be pulverized beneath great stamping presses, washed with many tens of thousands of gallons of river water and treated with mercury to separate out the silver. Jacob Stwart had bought his saloon in 1881 from a man named Frank Stilwell. The following year Frank Stilwell was shot to death by a man named Wyatt Earp, who fired a double-barreled shotgun into his chest as he stood

waiting for a train on the platform of the Southern Pacific Railroad station in Tucson.

There was a bottle on the corner of the table. Its label had been partially torn away, and its contents were not as advertised thereon. One of the men—the big, barrel-chested redheaded one—tipped it up into the light and watched an oily bubble rise.

—What all you reckon is in here?

—Turpentine, coal oil, tobacco juice, rattlesnake heads—the usual, the second man said. Pure vintage tanglefoot. Good for what ails ye.

—At least we still got our eyesight, the third man said. We can be thankful for that. J.W. here puts out a better product than most. Leaves out the stove polish.

—Wait'll you see what Johnny Haith puts out when he opens up that dance hall next month in Bisbee, the second man said. Johnny styles himself a true sporting man. Gonna have a still out back producing genuine clawhammer corn. Says he's importing some girls from San Francisco too. The real deal. Will be good to have that here close at hand rather than having to go to Clifton for it.

The first man, whose name was Red Sample, turned to the fourth member of the group, the quiet one, whose name was Delaney.

—Speaking of Bisbee, he said. Better be careful that spinster don't get her hook into you. They got a way of settin' it so gentle-like you don't even feel it, next thing you know you're floppin' in the boat.

Delaney looked at him.

—Spinster? She's younger than me by four or five years.

—Yeah, but she's already got that look. The boys at the Copper Queen says she comes in to get books. They got her pegged for a teacher or a church lady. You'd choose that over them three new sportin' gals Maud's got up at Clifton?

The second man, whose name was York Kelly, was pouring them each a drink.

—There's nothing for me in Clifton, Delaney said. Not since that trouble last year with Sawyer.

The third man, whose name was Tex Howard, was around thirty-five, round-faced and fair complected, with a wispy blonde beard and moustache although, like all of them, his skin had been considerably thickened and toughened by the weather.

—Bill Sawyer, he said, leaning over to spit into the cuspidor beside his foot. That son of a bitch had it coming if anybody ever did. You served him out proper, too. Walked right up to him while he was studying that hand of cards and give him three in the chest.

—Son of a bitch was dead before he hit the floor, Kelly said. Last thought in this life was trying to remember if a straight beat three of a kind.

Sample and Kelly laughed.

—He'll have plenty of time to mull that over sitting at that big card table in the sky. Well, not actually in the sky in his case. More of a duskier sort of place. Probably some of them boys he's settin' with now was pretty fair hands with a deck back in the day. He won't stand no better chance trimmin' them than he did us.

Howard turned back to Delaney.

—However, I do got to agree with you when it comes to that Clifton lockup. Little eight by twelve cell carved right into the mountain, like a coffin stood up on end. Dark as hell—you wake up there, at first you don't know but maybe you've passed on. Big Dan says he was already there when Hovey brought you in. What was that thing with Sawyer all about, anyway? Some little Mex waitress, wasn't it? What was her name? Dolly? Dolores?

—Her name was Dorinda, Delaney said. And any man who would treat a lady in such a manner should get what's coming to him.

—Lady? Howard began but Sample dropped a hand across his forearm.

—Anyway, Sample said. I would have to say you made your point pretty clear as far as that goes.

They lifted their drinks in the semblance of a toast and drank. Howard had his makings in the pocket of his shirt, and he set about rolling himself a smoke. When he was done, he licked it up and down and found a match and lit it. He looked up at Delaney through the smoke.

—So, Billy, I'm guessing the little lady in Bisbee knows you by your actual Christian name. As opposed to Robert Springer or James Johnson or Mormon Bob.

Delaney took a moment to answer.

—You'd be right in guessing that, he said. And I would also be right to wonder why that might be any of your business.

—Jesus, Tex, Sample said. Don't rile the lad. You've seen how he can be.

Kelly leaned forward to pour the others another drink.

—Johnny Haith is putting in an offer on that building in Bisbee, he said. Three doors down the street from Castaneda's. Been there a couple of weeks getting the lay of the land. Partnering up with that Waite fellow. Bisbee's about ready for an upgrade on its entertainment options. Johnny moves fast when he's got his eye on something.

They paused in their conversation to let Linus, Jacob Stwart's scullery boy, come through with his bucket and mop. Linus was a deaf mute, robbed of his wits in infancy when he had fallen unnoticed into a laundry tub and only retrieved several hours later when his grandmother began hanging clothes on the line. No one knew how he had managed to escape drowning or how he might have turned out otherwise, but now he went about his work accompanied by a pet gopher snake and spoke using a language of various animal sounds: billy goat, bullfrog, donkey, duck, rooster. The snake generally traveled draped around Linus's shoulders like a stole, but sometimes it would drop down inside his clothes to sleep, making a conspicuous bulge at Linus' waistline. When loose, it had free run of the place. Many was the time when some patron of Stwart's had looked down to find this serpent at his

feet and instinctively drawn his firearm, only to be stayed by a reminder of how much Jacob Stwart prized the animal for its rat-killing skills. Just now as Linus came passing among the tables the viper was peering forth between the top two buttons of his shirt, its black tongue flicking in and out. Once they were gone, Red Sample bent forward and sent a stream of tobacco juice ringing into the spittoon.

—Nothing I hate worse'n a snake. And a halfwit dummy to boot. Enough to give a man the fantods.

—That one's harmless enough, Kelly said. Not like them big diamondback sumbitches like to crawl into your bedroll at night.

Red Sample leaned back in his chair to address another man who was playing faro at a table behind him.

—How's she running, Dan?

The man addressed, a large man of about thirty dressed in a blue broadcloth shirt and wearing a sugar-loaf sombrero, didn't look up from over the card box.

—Not worth a shit, he said. Slick here keeps pulling the banker card on me.

—Never trust a man from Maine, Sample said. My old mammy taught me that.

—You had a mammy? Dan said without removing his eyes from the cards.

—Bet your ass, Sample said. Also tole me to beware of falling in with the wrong company.

—Never knowing that you *was* the company of which she was speaking, Dan said.

The others laughed. They were camped out past the slaughterhouse, a half mile east of town, and came in whenever one of them had some money. Dan Dowd had sixty dollars he had made hauling freight back and forth between the Chiricahua Mountains and Clifton. The others had just returned from selling three dozen head of cattle bearing Mexican brands to a rancher up in the Swisshelms.

—By God, I am tired of making my way in the world looking up a mule's ass, Dowd said. The world owes me an easier living than that, and I mean to take it.

The men sat drinking. Stwart's had a piano player, but the men did not like hearing the instrument played too early in the day.

—This was a great country onct, Howard said. Before all the bob wire and churches and legislatures come in. I should know. I seen it all. Earthquakes and blizzards and dust storms and floods. Man had to know how to take care of hisself. Couldn't fall back on no helpin' hand.

—Damn right, Sample said. It was somethin' all the time. Remember that time we was coming down off the Mogollons and that twister fell in behind us? Seemed like it picked up the entire goddamn desert and blowed it up to the top of the sky and it there just hangin' over us. Felt like you was lookin' up a chimbney fifty mile across. Thing caught us in some little piss-ant draw. Lightning strikin' all around and hail being flung down out of that whirlwind like fistfuls of Bland dollars. Then the dust to where you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Fellow we was with said it was Armageddon and it wasn't nobody at that moment ready to argue with him.

—Still wasn't nothing to match that flood in Clifton, Howard said. What was it, three year ago now? Wasn't no forty days and forty nights but it sure seemed like it. Wall of water come up out of Chase Creek bout the height of Stwart's windmill out back there. Entire town was under water mountain to mountain. Lifted the railroad tracks up out of the roadbed and dropped them down into the gulch like a handful of straw nubbins.

—If the Good Lord finally decided he'd seen enough, Clifton would be a likely place to start, Kelly said.

—Sure got Old Man Prentiss' attention, Sample said. He heared it coming, rushed back in to get his cash box from under the bar, then made a run for it. Found his body at the foot of Conglomerate Street buried beneath six foot of silt. All they had to do was put up a cross.

—Never try to outrun no flash flood, Howard said. That's my motto. Just find yourself somethin' that will float. Never did find Old Man Prentiss' money box, did they?

—Nope, never did, Sample said. Though not for any lack of trying. Practically had themselves another silver rush right there on Conglomerate Street. Folks out there with grub axes and shovels and dousin' rods.

—And then third and foremost, Howard said. We seen Tombstone burnt to the ground, not onct but twict. That time last year, that fire that begun in the Chink laundry, the volunteers run out of water so they just went up the street dynamitin' one place after the other so the fire wouldn't have nothin' to burn. Beat all you ever saw.

—Damn right, Sample said. You'd be settin' there with a drink in front of you, the boys would come in with a couple sticks of lit dynamite. Have to drink up quick and go to the place next door.

—But yet that still aint the final all-time topper, Howard said. Not when it comes to runnin' up on the strange and unexpected. Remember that night in Silver City?

There was a pause.

—Wait, Kelly said, shaking his head. That aint something needs brought up

They looked at him. He was a wiry, sinewy man, ferret-faced, descendant of four generations of Welsh coal miners bred for working underground who had followed the silver boom west.

—Why not? Howard said. You superstitious, Yorkie? Afraid of haints?

Delaney looked up from his glass.

—What happened in Silver City? he said. Something worse than dust storms and floods and fires?

—Somethin' peculiarer, Sample said. That's for damn sure.

Howard was looking at Delaney.

—What do you mean, what happened? You was there. Remember the picture-takin' fellow?

—No, Delaney said.

—They was a picture-takin' fellow set up outside of Willby's store. We all got our pictures took. You don't remember that?

—No, Delaney said.

—No wonder, Sample said. You was drunk as a boiled owl.

—We all was, Howard said.

—What happened? Delaney said.

—Well, we all got our pictures took, Howard said. But then it turned out this wasn't that fellow's mainest line of work. Doctor somebody-or-other. Marbanks. Marchwell. Chilblains—

—Marchbains, York Kelly said. Dr. Elihu Marchbains.

—That was it. Turns out this fellow was runnin' one of them medicine shows. Had a wagon set up that he was hawkin' miracle potions out the back of. Tells a few jokes and stories to draw in a crowd—Saturday night in Silver City, you know—then brings out a bottle of his potion and starts going on about its amazin' benefits. Good for whatever ails ye, he says. Well, he spots a man in the crowd, colored fella with a limp, and calls him up. 'Son,' says he, 'I can see you have a physical infirmity. How long, may I ask, have ye been so afflicted?' 'Since I was a child, suh,' the darky answers. 'A hogshead of nails rolled off the back of a freight wagon and crushed my laig. Left me crippled up for life.' 'Well, son,' the doctor says, 'This here is your lucky day. Just one teaspoon—a single teaspoon—of Dr. Marchbains' Fabulous Emulsion will restore you to perfect health.' He unstoppers the bottle and makes a show of measuring out one teaspoon exact, saying something like, 'Don't want to overdo it, folks. This man'll go cartwheeling off down the street like a five-year-old child.' Well, the nigger drinks his teaspoon and his head goes lolling back and his eyes bug out—and then he starts striding back and forth easy as you please, not a sign of a hitch in his step. And so the doctor is

just starting in with the next part of his spiel—'Who'll be first to step up…'—when Red here unholsters his Colt and starts kicking up the dust around the nigger's feet, which makes him dance sure enough. 'Look, doc,' Red calls out, 'I got some medicine here even better than that miracle juice of yourn.'

The four men around the table laughed, Red loudest of all. Once they were done, Delaney turned to Kelly.

—So what's the trouble with having that told? I've heard worse, especially where Red and Tex were involved.

York Kelly looked at Howard.

—Go ahead. Tell him the rest.

Howard poured himself another drink and set the bottle back down in the middle of the table.

—What the hell? You sure you don't remember?

—No, Delaney said.

—Well, a little bit later on those boys in Silver City decided a pot of tar and a few feathers might be in order, Dr. Milbank being such an obvious flim-flam man and all.

—Marchbains, Delaney said.

—Marchbains. You see, it turns out the cripple nigger weren't a cripple at all. It was all part of the act. Traveled with the doc from town to town ready to step up from out of the crowd when called upon. Some of the boys took him into the saloon down the street and he blew. But that wasn't the strangest part.

—Not by a long shot, Kelly said.

—No, Howard said. According to the boy—his name was Benjamin—the doctor really *was* a magician, able to fly hundreds of miles through the air and shoot balls of fire out of his hands and make things disappear. Said he had seen him empty a whole pasture of cattle in the blink of an eye. Marchbains told the boy he'd moved them cows to Casper, Wyoming, and the next day when they rolled into Casper there they was.

—And this boy knew enough about cows to be able to tell one herd from another? Delaney said.

—I reckon not, Howard said. We thought of that too. It wasn't until we was going through the back of the doctor's wagon that we was give pause. He had all sorts of traps back there, devilish-looking things, contraptions we couldn't put no name to nor think up no use for. Tubes and dials and coils. Saucers with moons and stars and heathenish-looking writing on them. Giant wooden eyeball on a stick that come apart.

He paused.

—Worst of all was these metal plates. Whole big stacks of them packed in straw.

—Collodion plates, Kelly said. For the tintypes.

—That's right, Howard said. The man had took pictures of all kinds of things. Babies in coffins, chickens and rabbits and goats, old fence posts, women turned around so all you could see was the backs of their heads. Who takes pictures like that?

—Nobody, Sample said.

—And cowboys, Howard said. A whole stack of cowboys. Hundreds of them. Every cowboy they ever was, it seemed like. There were men there I hadn't seen or thought about for years. Men who had gone under or were at Yuma or just up and disappeared. But they was all there, their pictures anyways.

—And we was rememberin' how he'd just took all of our'n too, Sample said. I had put mine in my saddlebag, thinkin' I would send it to my mother. But that was the little tin one. These in the wagon was on big metal plates. Ghostly, spooky-lookin' things. What's the use in such a thing?

They sat for a while.

—We had traveling men like him back in the old country, Kelly said. Drive their goat carts along the back roads selling odds and ends to farm women. Wasn't their real business, though.

Kelly looked at Howard.

—Tell him what else Benjamin said. You come this far.

—Well, Howard said. He said that the doctor had made him.

There were another several seconds of silence.

—Made him? Delaney said.

—That's right, Howard said. That's what he said. Made him right there in the back of that medicine wagon. Out of a recipe in a book. A homun– a homun–

—Homunculus, Kelly said.

—Why did he make him black? Delaney said.

Howard shook his head.

—Well now, Billy, goddamn it, how the hell would I know that? I wished you would of been there sober enough to ask him. Maybe it was what the recipe called for.

—Like a chocolate cake, you mean? Delaney said. Then what?

—Well, by that point the boys in Silver City had given it further thought. Instead of tar and feathers they was thinkin' more along the lines of a rope and lamp post.

Again Howard stopped.

—And? Delaney said.

—Go ahead, Kelly said. Tell him.

—Well, just as the boys was makin' ready to truss him up and launch him into eternity, the doc rose up and made another speech. 'Boys,' he said, 'I can understand your feelin's. Just give me one chance, and I will show you something that aint hoax nor fraud nor flim-flam neither one. Something real. If you want to stretch my neck after that, I won't make no objection.' We was standin' there in the lights outside the Acme Saloon. And so the doctor went back to his wagon and unloaded a wooden box—oh, about yea big—

Howard spaced his hands apart on the table.

—and he brought it into the Acme and set it down on the bar. The box was painted green, and they was a pinhole in one end.

—So a diorama, Delaney said.

Howard looked at him.

—That what it was? None of us could put a name to it. Just a box with a pinhole to us. He set it down on the table

and said, 'Well, boys. Who'll have a look? But I warn you, what you will see inside this box aint no child's play. What you see you will carry with you forever, and you won't never be the same again.' Well, there was some general grumbling and milling around, then Charley Bigelow steps up. He was a drover me and Red rode with many a time, steady hand and a damn good man in a bar fight. Well, Charley steps up and says, 'I'll have a look. Probably aint nothing more than a dirty picture, and I done already seen plenty of those.' So he steps up and puts his eye to the hole. He holds it there for a few seconds, then straightens up, white as a sheet. He don't say nothing, just puts his hat on and walks out into the street.

—What did he see? Delaney said.

—Nobody knows. Nobody else had the gumption to look. We turned the grifter loose, and he took his box and nigger and wagon and left. Don't know if he's still around or not.

—He's around, Kelly said.

—Why didn't you ask Charley Bigelow what he saw? Delaney said.

—Wouldn't a done no good, Howard said. We rode with him plenty after that. You never saw a more changed man. Didn't go into town hardly at all. Couldn't hardly get a word out of him. The doc was right. Whatever he saw inside that box put him into a whole other outlook on life.

—Like I said, Kelly said. Some things are best left alone. Best not brought up.

There was one drink each left in the bottle, and so they finished it and called for another. The piano player had come in and was sitting on his bench but not playing. He had a schooner of beer on the window ledge beside him.

—That thing Haith's eyeballing in Bisbee, Howard said. It could be a close-run deal.

—Keep still, Kelly said. No need to be blabbing our business all over town.

—This aint all over town, Howard said. This here is Jacob W. Stwart's High Times Saloon. Aint nobody here but us chickens.

—Payday's the tenth, Sample said. That's two weeks from Monday. Sure they'll want to have the payroll in Castaneda's strongbox by Friday. Runnin' it in on Saturday is cutting it too thin. Nothing worse than a bunch of peckish miners who aint been paid.

—Payroll is seven thousand, Kelly said. Split five ways. What does that come out to, Billy?

Delaney looked at him.

—Fourteen hundred. Barely enough to get Red and Tex here through just one night at Maud's.

—But for that one night, we're gonna make them three gals awful happy, Howard said. Aint that right, Red?

—Happy and a good bit sore, Sample said. Unless I miss my guess. Rode hard and put up wet.

From behind them there was a disturbance, a scraping of chairs, and they looked up to see Big Dan Dowd on his feet.

—Well, by God, he said. I have seen that goddamn four of spades for the last goddamn time.

He had his knife out of his belt and before the faro dealer could remove his hand from the table Big Dan had brought the blade down in a swift chopping action that sent three of the man's fingers skittering off onto the floor. Then with a practiced motion he flipped the knife and brought it down again, this time pinioning the man's hand flat against the table. For a moment the dealer sat in disbelief looking at what had befallen him, then he rose to his feet and produced a piercing, inhuman-sounding cry. The sound caused all others in the room to subside. Men paused over their cards, drinks in hand, pipes and cigars burning, to look in that direction. With his right hand the dealer reached to unpin the knife, but Dowd leaned across and slapped him hard across the face, causing him to fall back into his chair. This disturbance attracted the attention of Jacob Stwart, who came walking around the corner

of the bar wiping his hands on a towel. He was in his shirtsleeves with a dead cigar clamped into the corner of his mouth.

—What seems to be the trouble here?

The faro dealer had again half risen, his eyes closed and his face contracted into a silent rictus of pain.

—This man here's been drawing double all morning, Jacob, Dowd said. I finally had enough.

—Brought new meaning to the term 'caught red-handed,' Sample said.

Stwart turned to look at the dealer, who now appeared to be permanently frozen, statue-like, in his present pose. Blood was running off his hand across the cards on the table and onto the floor. Stwart edged closer to the dealer and bent down a little to look him in the eyes.

—Jimmy, I warned you about trying any of your fancy tricks in my place. Boys here expect a fair game, which they got every right to.

He turned to Dowd.

—Dan, go ahead and take whatever part was yours out of his poke. And I reckon you'll be wanting your knife back.

—Damn straight, Dowd said. If Jimmy here is through using it.

Stwart reached over and uncleated the knife and set it down on the table in front of Dowd. Jimmy rose, holding his bleeding hand aloft as if in mute accusation against the injustice of the universe. As he went weaving among the tables toward the door, the other patrons sat watching as if some pariah had been discovered in their midst and sent forth into the outer dark. The man's shirt was saturated with blood to his belt line. Behind him Sample rose from his chair and kicked the three bloody knuckle joints after him.

—Hey, Jimmy, he called out. Aint you forgettin' something?

As the dealer reached the front door, he met Linus standing there with his mop and bucket. Half turning, he held his bloody stump up before him, presuming perhaps that of all

men Linus might best be suited to cast a knowing or even sympathetic eye upon his misfortune. In response Linus cocked his head and produced a medley of animal sounds: bullfrog and donkey and duck. Jimmy's eyes then moved downward where they met those of the serpent—russet-colored, blunt-snouted, golden-eyed—peering out from the bosom of the boy's shirt. Another expression crossed his face then, and he turned and pushed his way out through the door and into the street. Behind him the clientele of Stwart's High Times Saloon returned to their business. The piano player finished his beer and began picking out a soft and tentative version of 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny.' Big Dan Dowd gathered up the cards and began wiping them clean of blood, front and back. He pulled the faro box over in front of him and looked out across the room.

—New dealer, he said. Who's feeling lucky?

4. Among the Mormons

Later that same Thanksgiving Day, sitting in Jacob Stwart's High Times Saloon, Delaney found himself recalling once again his time among the Mormons. He had been with the wagon train when it had started east, making up at Forty Mile Spring. His first impression had been how young they all were, how clean and well-scrubbed—godly folk, men and women not much older than himself, but all with families, three or four children each.

That was October of 1879. The San Juan mission, it was called. He had hired on as a scout. He was twenty-three at that time and traveling under the name Bob Springer. He remembered dancing to Mormon fiddlers at Fifty Mile Spring and Dance Hall Rock, Utah Territory. The Saints had gathered from all over southwest Utah—from strange-sounding places like Paragonah and Parowan and Panguitch and Upper Kanab. Biblical-sounding places, whether from the actual Bible or this

new one of theirs he did not know, but certainly a Bible they were living out. He had heard how when the names of the twenty-six chosen ones were called from the pulpit of the Parowan meeting house they had responded joyfully, though it meant uprooting themselves and their families from comfortable homes to venture off into rough, unknown territory. From the looks of them, it might have been a village picnic or a hayride they were embarking on. But it was not they who underestimated the task before them: it was the Gentiles who misjudged their fervor and drive. The arduousness of the mission was part of the point. That was why they celebrated it. God did not ask easy favors.

The current mission required that they proceed eastward, cross the Colorado and make their way to a remote spot along the San Juan River some 250 miles distant, there to plant a new Mormon colony. To sow the seed of faith in this barren wilderness. To reach out to the Navajos and Utes and Paiutes, for one of the fundamental teachings of their faith was that the Indians were a backslidden part of the House of Israel who would one day embrace the gospel and become white, delightsome people. That the colonization of the San Juan would help move the world one step closer to those final days when Christ would descend to Earth, gather up the pure of heart and usher them to their eternal places in glory.

The company had assembled some forty miles southeast of Escalante at a place called Road's End, aptly named, for beyond that point there was no road, not the faintest trace of one. Instead, there was only raw prairie and harsh mountain terrain, in Delaney's view the worst country over which wagons had ever attempted to travel. A triple span of oxen dragging a heavy, forked tree was required to break down the greasewood brush sufficiently for the wagons to pass. There was snow and bitter cold. Children foraged through the surrounding countryside in search of shadscale bushes to burn, which the men then rode out and lassoed and dragged back to camp. A pile stacked higher than a Conestoga wagon gave off an indifferent heat for about an hour. The livestock were

hungry. Wolf packs hunted the strays. There was some talk in the camp of turning back but deep snows behind them in the Escalantes ruled out this option, even had they been willing to consider it. Sitting among them at night, never warm, Delaney had occasion to reflect upon what had brought him to this juncture.

He had been in Salt Lake City sitting in Wells Spicer's office when he first heard of this expedition. Brigham Young had died in August, and Spicer's term as U.S. Commissioner for the Utah Territory was entering its final year. Not that Spicer took his political duties very seriously. Neither this appointment nor even his legal work in the John D. Lee trial had ever shaken him free of his dreams of prospecting.

—First their Prophet dies and now their Moses, Spicer was saying. More trials for the Saints in bringing forth the kingdom of Zion in the American West. Their state of Deseret.

—Yes.

—Don't bet against 'em, though. No loners or Prince Hamlet malcontents in the whole outfit.

—No. Whatever that means.

—Their new president, John Taylor, is a good man. He intends to carry the torch forward. There is a new mission to be announced into southeastern Utah. Up along where Montezuma Creek empties into the San Juan, just north of the Navajo Mountains. Ever been there?

—No.

—I have, prospecting. Never seen a harder country. All mesas and slickrock and slot canyons. Why folks would try to live there…well, you'd have to ask the Mormons. Maybe it's the remoteness and harshness that attracts them.

—Maybe so.

—Well, as I say, President Taylor has announced this errand for the Lord. No doubt he'll find plenty of takers. And, as I say, President Taylor is a good man. But some of the Elders are a little uneasy. With President Young gone there's

been talk of revisiting some key points of Mormon theology—I think you know which ones I mean. The Honorable Rutherford B. Hayes is asking Congress to strip them of their rights as citizens, to make plural marriage a felony.

He looked across his desk at Delaney.

—Which is something else you might consider asking them when you get a chance. How in the world a man of sound mind would think having five or six wives a good idea when it seems obvious that one is too many.

—I doubt I will do that. Make that my business, I mean.

Spicer nodded.

—A sensible position. Anyway, those new colonists on the San Juan, being at some distance from Salt Lake City—it seems possible that they might have some ideas of their own. How to make their faith balance with the law of the land like all other good Americans. Things of that nature.

—Maybe so.

—So this is what my friends among the Elders—and myself, of course—are proposing. That you sign on with this party. They'll be eager to have you, passing through all that Navajo territory. Navajos are none too happy having these industrious white folk moving in to compete with them for game, pasture and water. Keep your eyes open, tell us what you see.

—A spy then.

A pained expression crossed Spicer's face.

—Such a callous term. I think of it as simply an objective reporter. President Taylor doesn't need any schismatics.

—Any what?

—Schismatics. Splitters-off. Heretics. Christian church's been full of them from time immemorial. Gnostics, Arians, Manicheans, not to mention Martin Luther and those pesky Protestants.

He paused, lifting his eyebrows, his eyes twinkling.

—And last but not least, Joe Smith and his Latter-day Saints. The Mormon Elders plan on having none of it.

Spicer kept a silver letter opener in a German stoneware mug on his desk. He lifted it out and began using it to clean his fingernails, stopping from time to time to spread his fingers and inspect his progress.

—I do not know what it be like to live as one of these people, he said. But you and I have now spent a considerable time among them. This thing with John D. Lee has left its mark on me.

Spicer lifted his eyes to look across his desk at him.

—As I suppose it must have on you.

—I don't know, Delaney said. I don't think so.

—Funny thing, Spicer said, returning to his task. I guess it don't matter so much what you believe in, so long as you believe in something. Like Prophet Smith's vision that the original Garden of Eden was located in Jackson County, Missouri, right there on the Kansas line, and that after the Fall Adam and Eve were driven out about ninety miles north of there, into Daviess County. So a slight variation from the Biblical geography, which I believe has the place located in Mesopotamia.

—I guess so.

Again he looked up at Delaney.

—You guess so? You ever been to the great state of Missouri?

—Yes. You know I have. Walked across the entire damn state when I was eighteen. And a good bit further too.

Spicer smiled.

—Ah yes, he said. I had forgotten. I don't suppose at the time you realized that you were passing through the birthplace of humanity, where our first parents were set down to tend the Tree of Life. And then cast out into Daviess County, Missouri? 'Fallen' doesn't cover it. Not as bad a landing spot as Arkansas maybe, but damned close.

—No.

—Well, no matter, Spicer said, leaning back in his chair. I do not know when or if I shall be drawn back into Mormon

affairs. But I would welcome your impressions of this present endeavor. Whether it is an expression of the true faith or something else. Governor Murray is already on the warpath about these so-called Mormon 'emigration schemes.' So there are lots of irons in the fire. Which, of course, has drawn the attention of our friends at the *Daily Tribune*.

Again he smiled.

—What was it that they called me in that Fourth of July editorial? 'One Spicer, the most complete jack-Mormon that ever sucked pap from the kingdom of Brigham.' Memorable phraseology, that. As if I had no actual given name but was some sort of carpetbagging nonentity. Well, if the shoe fits, I suppose—

He rocked forward and sent the letter opener ringing back into the stein.

—In any case, this San Juan mission seems an important undertaking. Reliable intelligence will be valuable. Can you put your eyes on it for me? Just tell me what you see.

And so Delaney was with Brother Silas Smith when they reached the Colorado River on December 11, 1879. Through a thin slot in the rock, wide enough only for a single man to pass, they could see the river three-quarters of a mile ahead and half a mile straight down. It was like a sliver of paradise presented in a fleeting glimpse only, tantalizing but unattainable. For William Delaney, now in the seventh year of his own hejira, the irony of it made perfect sense. After months of toil and suffering—the storms and snow and wolves and sickness and Indians—there it stood. He watched Brother Smith shifting back and forth on his horse, looking at the vision before him.

—Well, he said. Hole-in-the-Rock, I so name thee. The Lord has provided. Now it is up to us to see His will be done.

It took three days for the rest of the wagons to come up, a two-mile long caravan of riders and walkers and livestock on the hoof, but Delaney had not been there to see it. Likewise,

he saw nothing of the six weeks' work during which, instead of turning around and going home like sensible people, fifty of the group's men scaled the cliff walls, dynamiting out the narrow notch until it became an almost vertical road, wide enough for a single wagon to pass. Like the ladder in Jacob's dream, Brother Smith had said—the gradual ascent through virtue toward the tabernacle not made by hands. Nor did Delaney see each wagon move up and then down through the notch with its wheels rough-locked and a dozen men hanging on to ropes behind. He was not there when the wagons arrived at the makeshift ferry to be loaded, two by two, and transported across the Colorado River. He saw none of these things because Brother Smith had sent him on ahead to chart a course for the wagons to follow from Hole-in-the-Rock to the San Juan. The Mormons already had a small settlement there, which they had named Fort Montezuma. That was where the rich pasturelands were said to be, like the Canaan of the Bible. He tried to imagine what it would be like to come to such a place and know that it was his destiny to remain there forever, he and his wife and his children, there to serve as instruments of a Savior who had first announced Himself on some buried tablets discovered in 1827 on a drumlin hill in Palmyra, New York. He tried to imagine it but could not. He felt only a brief moment of vertigo such as a child might experience upon looking into a mirror and becoming aware that that disparate image was *him*. No. Although traveling among these people, he was not one of them, nor could he ever be. If a thousand-pound angel named Moroni wielding a flaming sword had dropped down onto the road beside him, it would have prompted some response—fight or flight, but not faith. Belief was a thing unto itself, as far as he could tell. As Spicer had said, it was not a question of what you believed but whether you had the capacity for such a thing. It was the space that mattered: it could be filled with anything. There among the Mormons beneath Dance Hall Rock he had attended their services, had listened to them sing 'The Spirit of God Like a

Fire Is Burning.' Had heard 'A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.' He had listened, feeling the force and passion inside them, but recognizing no answering impulse within himself.

And so it was that he had started out on the 17th of December carrying sufficient food on his pack mule to last eight days. The map Brother Smith had given him showed the distance to Fort Montezuma to be roughly seventy miles. Even given the nature of the country, he thought that he could make ten miles a day. There had been some delays that morning as Brother Smith wished to convene the elders for some final prayers and blessings, and so it was noon before he was underway. He led his animals slowly up the steep grade toward Hole-in-the-Rock and then even more slowly down the back side, with the talus sliding beneath them and the animals balking. It was like passing through a keyhole, he thought, leaving one world and stepping into another. Again he wondered how anyone could imagine bringing a train of wagons this way. He had worked on some roofing jobs when he first arrived in California, and this is what it reminded him of: walking up and down a steeply pitched and crumbly shake roof, the angle probably forty-five or fifty degrees. And what were the Mormons proposing? Two hundred fifty travelers, eighty wagons, a thousand head to cattle.

At the foot of the grade a broad apron of packed brown sand led down to the water. The river here was perhaps a hundred yards across, its riffled surface evidence of underwater rocks. Whoever had named it the Colorado was not thinking of this stretch, which was a deep opaline. It also looked cold. The horse had come to stand at his shoulder, eyeing the eddying, slow-moving current with suspicion. Delaney turned to look at it.

—Not my idea, he said. I know it's December. What did you expect from these people?

He shucked out of his boots and clothes then and tied them across his saddle and led the animals into the water. The river was not ice-filled but it could have been, the water at first burning like fire and then gradually traveling up his body,

benumbing him almost to the point of paralysis. The animals followed, snorting and rolling their eyes and holding their heads finically above the flood. When he felt the horse swimming he lay out alongside it, holding on to the pommel of his saddle and towing the mule by its lead rope behind. The current bore them forty or fifty yards downstream before the horse was able to find the bottom and bring them surging out. Once ashore, he stood naked, hopping from side to side on his benumbed feet as he fumbled his way back inside his clothes. When he was done, he pulled together a heap of driftwood in the lee of a river boulder and built a fire. It was windy along the watercourse, and he had some trouble getting it started, but once it took hold, it burned with a vengeance, the flames finding their way in among the worm-scored timbers and the sparks bearing off downwind. He had his map wrapped in oilcloth inside his saddlebag, and he took it out and sat, his boots practically in the fire, consulting it. From time to time he lifted his eyes to look about the place where he was—a granite shingle rising gradually toward a series of washboard bajadas and then the first small grouping of mountains to the east. Slick Rocks, the map said. As he sat, the horse came in closer to the fire, its coat smoking.

—I got you, Sam, he said. Just let me get my feet unfroze first.

Once he had finished warming himself, he rose and looked to his animals. Coming up out of the river the mule had slipped and fallen, displacing the canvas pack it was carrying and wetting some of his possibles. Cursing, he unloaded the mule, spreading its cargo before the fire to dry. With the day now so well advanced, he decided it unwise to re-embark that afternoon. He did not wish to find himself travelling through this unknown country after dark. Already one day of his proposed week's itinerant had evaporated—an ill omen, perhaps, but not to be helped. He unsaddled the horse and wiped down both animals with a dry gunny sack. Just down the river course a stand of Mexican grass, bleached

brown by the weather, extended from a rocky point, and he led the animals there and hobbled them. Already, a pale moon was rising in the northeast, and on his way back to the fire he stopped to look at it. It seemed not much more substantial than the afternoon sky and empty-faced like the finial he remembered atop the church steeple back in Scranton. That church was the Zion Lutheran. The pastor was a man named Zizelman who had arrived from San Antonio, Texas, in 1860, fleeing the wrath of an anti-abolitionist lynch mob. He remembered walking down Spruce Street between his mother and father, watching for this adornment to appear above the adjacent warehouses like a distant star. His brother John's welcome home after the war had been held in that church. Now he kept the moon in view as he made his way back to his campsite, the wafer so thin and translucent as to appear unreal and keeping pace with him as he walked. Along the way he gathered more wood for the fire.

He spent that night stirring periodically to mend the fire and listening to the river run in a thick, unending sibilance. Overhead the stars rotated in the void. It did not seem that he ever truly slept but instead shambled through those hours in some twilit state where thoughts hatched on their own and consciousness was known only when it resurfaced to recognize that it had not been present. And so he was not surprised when he woke at dawn to find himself in among a herd of animals. He lay there for a moment listening to the dry scrabble of their hooves on the playa and waiting for them to vanish, but they did not. He sat up. They were strange goat-like creatures, perhaps a dozen in number—rangy, long-eared, fawn-colored beasts with narrow inquisitive faces. The animals were standing in loose formation, all facing the river, all looking at him. Llamas, he thought. He had heard of them. If not llamas some other breed of sheep or goat unknown to him, perhaps belonging to the Navajo who lived in these mountains and were reputed to be skilled herdsmen. The animals coming down at dawn to drink at the river as was their wont and finding instead a strange biped asleep on the ground. He

turned to look downriver. The horse and mule were looking his way too.

As he rose to his feet, the animals turned, bleating, and began picking their way back the way they had come—all except one, a docile-looking creature, amber-eyed and black-tufted, which stood some fifteen feet away, watching him. Had he required meat he might have taken it—such was the cowboy custom when it came to loose stock—but he did not require meat. Instead, he rose from his blankets, put on his boots and went walking out toward it, thinking it might be accustomed to human touch. In response the animal turned and began moving away. It passed slowly across the beach before entering a nook in among the rocks. It was a different path than that taken by the rest of the herd and led up a winding avenue of eroded stone. A game trail, perhaps, leading down from the chaparral. He walked on, following it. From time to time the goat stopped to look back. The corridor turned back on itself, then ended abruptly in a chamber of fallen stone. There was no sign of the goat. The sides of the room were almost vertical, and llama or no llama, he did not see how the animal could have climbed out. He circled the space, sighting up the walls. He stood there feeling foolish, not so much for having involved himself in a lark with a dumb animal as to have called this parable down upon his head. For some reason, he found himself thinking again of the Mormons. He did not know much about Mormons, still less about goats and nothing at all about llamas. He had heard of Judas goats, trained to lead sheep to slaughter. In Victorville, California, he had worked for a rancher who often said, disparagingly, of his ranch hands, *La cabra siempre tira al monte*—'The goat always heads to the mountain'—without really understanding what he was talking about. All he knew now was that he was standing here stupidly alone. His second day out, like the first, met with confusion.

He took one more slow circuit around his enclosure before he found the fissure. It was located about ten feet up the eastern wall, covered by a lip of rock, and virtually invisible

from the ground. The animal's own Hole-in-the-Rock. He climbed up to it. It was as if a jagged vein had somehow been removed from the rock. He turned his shoulders and slipped inside, the crevasse lit from some distant point and smelling of iron and rainwater. He inched his way along for perhaps thirty yards, the passage close and serpentine, before it opened out again and he found himself standing upon a stone cornice with all the country to the east spread out before him. He could not say how extensive a prospect it was—eighty or a hundred miles he imagined, quite possibly encompassing the entirety of the journey that he had been tasked with making. It was through this labyrinthine expanse that his paper map purported to guide him. Somewhere out there lay the settlement of San Juan. He could imagine Brother Smith finding great significance in this moment, like Moses standing atop the mountain surveying the land of the Israelites' deliverance, so Delaney stood for a while surveying it too. It was some vista, all right, the openness of the world even more impressive after the enclosed space from which he had just emerged. Like a baby coming out of the womb, he imagined himself saying to Brother Smith. He stood for a while watching the early light rise into the sky and over the convolute jumble of canyons and mesas and columns and spires extending as far as the eye could see. He was hoping that the llama might somehow re-appear but it did not—the messenger become the message, he supposed—and so after a minute or two more he turned and re-entered the crevasse and started back for his horse and mule.

The picture from this promontory was the one he carried in his head as he rode out past the Slick Rocks into the territory beyond. Although he made an effort to correlate the actual topography to his paper map, from the beginning he mistrusted the process. The instrument reminded him too much of the crude treasure maps that circulated everywhere during his days in Silver City, the landmarks drawn thereon seeming as provisional and arbitrary and even fictional as what

one might encounter in a work of allegory. Such maps had been common currency in the barrooms there. The actual work of mining—harsh, monotonous, dangerous—seemed to spawn an imaginary counterworld in which the necessity for labor was suspended and gold lay everywhere on the ground. Rumors circulated of lost mines worked by hermits and lone trappers and daft woodsmen in locales so remote they could never again be found once quitted and whose existence was corroborated only by these crude and cryptic waybills. Propositions were offered, deals struck. Men ventured off into the unmarked wilderness with only a torn page to guide them.

And so, consulting his map that day, he circled what he took to be Hermit Lake and entered Castle Gorge—apt enough, it seemed, with its steep, loaf-like mesas rising abruptly from the desert floor and topped with ramparts resembling a vast cathedral or citadel. But how many other nearly identical formations might there be? It occurred to him that the naming of such things might be of use only to those who had seen them before. In any case, he rode all that day across a dusty red plain surrounded by these peaks. It was an imposing landscape, though obviously much eroded from some previous state he found impossible to imagine. What could this place have looked like newly made and smoking? Now the dominant impression was one of emptiness, made all the more unsettling by the remains of human habitations built into the surrounding cliffs. Riding slowly, he eyed these dwellings. He had seen similar ruins before but never in such profusion. No one he had met in the West had ever expressed the slightest curiosity about them, not even Spicer. He was left to reach his own conclusions. To him they resembled insects' nests set into the rock as ants or wasps will make their homes out of whatever natural materials are at hand. He had encountered the nests of these insects in all kinds of places: beneath the eaves of houses and in rotten logs and encrypted inside sawdust piles. Opportunistic builders, he supposed, jealous of their secrecy,

reclusive, lethal if disturbed. But who knew to what extent this description might apply to these vanished people.

At dusk that day he camped beside a spring he thought might be Green Water, although the water did not particularly strike him that way. Then again, the Río Colorado, as he had just seen, was not red. He estimated that he had covered ten miles that day but it was difficult to say, so indirect had been his route. The next day proved even more so. Attempting to make his way east, he entered and then backtracked out of a series of nearly identical blind canyons, all northward running and all eventually ending in steep abutments of rock. It occurred to him that in so proceeding according to his map he was carrying out, in a more expansive version, his experience behind the goat. It was not until late afternoon that he found a way through the massif. This took the form of a barranca with sidewalls laid down in pale, liquid-looking layers and honeycombed with dozens more of the ancient stone houses. At sunset he tied off his horse and pack mule and climbed up to one of them.

It was a multi-tiered affair, a series of square enclosures each with a single entrance, similar to an oversized birdhouse. The image of the birdhouse—dark roofed, unornamented—brought to mind a picture of these ancient folk as a species altogether different from himself, a monstrous flittering race that spoke in warbling tweets and twitters and sat perched upon their mud porticoes cocking their heads at whatever shadows might pass upon the plain below. As quickly as he could he struck this image from his brain, and with the twilight streaking overhead in reds and purples and golds, he walked through the place. In the largest structure he counted seven rooms, one with a pit in the floor that must have served as a cistern or granary, and a domed clay oven that appeared as if it could still be operational. He stood for a while looking about. There was no denying the ingenuity of this construction. Here was shelter from the elements and protection against enemies, a strong communal feeling from living among family and clan. But were these sufficient reasons to build in the midst of such

emptiness, where acquiring even the simplest necessities of life would have required enormous effort? Where game to hunt and fields to plant and herbs to forage must lie at considerable distance, and everything hauled up these cliffsides? On a level higher up he could see niche-like excavations and broken rock walls that might once have served as terrace gardens. But even with cisterns to collect rainwater and every square inch of soil carefully husbanded, survival here must have been precarious. It did indeed seem a castle—a castle built for siege.

He stood breathing in. The air at this height was cold and pristine, but after a few minutes something else came to him. It was the smell of the place, which was not of dust from the ancient bricks or even the surviving hint of human habitation. It was the smell of fear. He could smell it. It was a smell he recognized, something he had smelled upon himself in a dozen squalid episodes, none of which did him proud but all of them contributing to the man here present. Those instances carried within his person like the growth rings of a tree, impossible to reconfigure or disavow. He supposed that for a whole race it could be the same. Yes, it was fear. This was a place built for defense. Impregnable, it seemed, unless an army should appear on the plain below with ballistas and catapult and trebuchet. In a time of men without such weapons, without horses even, what could it have been that required them to live in such high citadels? It could only have been other men—marauders from another world whose lives were consummated in the blood of their victims, men who did not build in brick or stone and cared nothing for granaries and cisterns and terraced gardens, men who had left behind no trace of themselves by which they could be known. Men, but creatures totally unfounded, processing in ragged columns across the red plains bearing their totems before them. Pillagers and connoisseurs of human flesh—man corn, they called it—nomads from off the southern wastes where feeding upon the flesh of other men was the seal of their realm. Expert at scaling such high walls as these like troops of simians climbing after

their nested prey, aided by witchcraft and sorcery and spells. Falling upon these cliff folk at unsuspected intervals, night and day. Worshipers of devils with names now lost, savants of a world of evil whose lineaments were still retained in the history of places such as this. Nomads with no homes, the idea being but anathema, worse than death. This was what they chiefly found to hate in these cliff-dwellers, huddled behind their earthen walls, like pigeons in their cote. And so to them they brought the lessons of the strong. Afterwards, after the terror and the feasting and the slaking of blood and with their captives bound neck to neck together, they would take shelter in some distant cave, home to the earth mother and the spirits of the underworld, and there await until the time arrived to fall once again upon these hapless, sedentary pigeons. He stood among the heaps of crumbling brick breathing it in, smelling the history of the place. It was the oldest law of nature, predator and prey, one casting the shadow and the other feeling its chill. He looked again out across the bolsón where the sun was setting and at the peaks and mesas encircling him. He looked at his map. Castle Ruin, it said.

He continued east as best he could although both the topography of the land and the old Indian trails continued to dictate otherwise. It was mid-afternoon of the fifth day before he came to a break in the cliffs that allowed him to turn once again due east. Clay Hill Pass, he thought it was. The walls on both sides of the pass were marked with veins of quartz like lightning bolts, and egg-shaped bulges of rock rose from the canyon floor. The pass itself was forested a deep blue, an unlikely swath of vegetation above the treeless plain, and he climbed all afternoon among ranks of mountain firs that scented the air with balsam. Counting back, it occurred to him that Christmas must be somewhere close at hand, perhaps only three or four days away. It was not a holiday he had often had occasion to celebrate during his time in the West. His companions, when he had them, were inclined toward more

uncomplicated festivals. The displays of religiosity and childlike innocence seemed to make them uncomfortable. He had been party to one memorable Christmastide, however. It had taken place in the town of Silver Reef, Utah, not two years past. Formerly Bonanza City and later Rockpile, by 1878 Silver Reef had grown to around 2,000 people, mostly miners who had come over from Pioche when the silver there played out. It had a Main Street a mile long, a Wells Fargo, a fire department, several hotels and restaurants. Being such a thriving, civilized community, the good people of Silver Reef decided it was high time they celebrated a 'frontier Christmas.'

The event was held in the miners' hall. Many of the miners' children had never had a Christmas before, and they were beside themselves with anticipation. A young fir was cut and brought in and decorated with popcorn, yaupon berries and candles. A load of toys arrived by stagecoach from St. George and was laid out beneath the tree. A miner named Henry Sykes had dressed up as Santa Claus, complete with false beard and red toboggan hat, and made a grand entrance carrying a sack of candy and fruit. Christmas carols were sung, and Sykes had just begun taking gifts from beneath the tree and placing them in the hands of excited, laughing children when his false whiskers caught fire from one of the lighted candles. It took him a few moments to understand his predicament—Delaney and some of the others had noticed it some seconds earlier—but once he grasped the situation, he reacted decisively. Casting aside his armload of presents and cursing profusely, he began clawing at the beard, which he had affixed with a thick layer of gum adhesive. Unable to rid himself of the thing, he had then gone rushing from the room, torn open the front door and thrown himself headlong into a snowbank. The children, momentarily aghast, had then burst into laughter and applause, assuming that such a performance was a regular part of the Christmas festivities. Delaney shook his head, smiling. A frontier Christmas indeed.

It was the smell of these fir trees, he thought, that had called up this memory. The Indian trail here was very clearly marked, and he was thinking of how the Old People, whoever they were, must have traveled through this very forest—horseless, in parties of eight or ten, hunting or foraging or on pilgrimages—moving down from their cliffside fortresses and over this same pass by the same process he had. Imagining things through their eyes, wondering if it was the very strangeness of the place that drew them—he was thinking all this when his horse suddenly shied and reared beneath him. He had been riding with the reins held loosely in his left hand and his feet tipped into the stirrups, and the sudden movement sent him headfirst over the horse's neck. He tried saving himself first with his knees and then with the saddle horn, but it was too late. He had time only to tuck his head before he came crashing down flat on his back in the road. For a moment he lay there, unable to breathe. Ass over teakettle, the old hands called it. It had happened to him before. It happened to everyone in the bronc-busting business. But not out here, not skylarking around with your horse not under you good. Break a shoulder or leg or back out here and you were done. Lie there until darkness came and the cold crept through you inch by inch until it put you to sleep for good.

He lay for a while longer, trying to get his breathing back. For a moment he considered the possibility that the memory of Henry Sykes plunging headlong into the snowbank had somehow brought down this consequence upon himself. The revenge of Henry Sykes. But he did not linger on the thought. Instead, once he had taken a number of regular breaths, he lifted his head—just in time to watch his horse and mule disappear into a thicket of pinyon junipers back down the way. He sat up then, moving his legs gingerly and feeling along his spine and ribs for signs of damage. His hat was lying a few feet away, and he reached over to pick it up.

—Lucky your fool head aint still inside it, he said.

He had gotten himself up onto one knee and was dusting himself off when he looked up and saw the bear. It was

standing upright beneath a cedar tree just off the track ahead, holding its snout in the air and looking about nearsightedly. Standing erect as it was, the bear made for a towering figure, perhaps ten feet tall and with a weight he could not even begin to estimate. It turned in his direction, still standing on two legs as if preparing to walk. In that posture it resembled a woodland monster of his imagination or some sort of costumed figure on stilts in a holiday parade. A hallucinated vision such as taking a sudden somersault off the back of a horse might induce.

—Jesus, he said.

He remained absolutely still, watching it. He thought he might be downwind—the horse had obviously smelled it—but he wasn't sure. He had heard plenty of bear stories during his time in the West. Among some men bears were held in almost supernatural awe. How, even weighing 500 pounds, they could run faster than a racehorse and shinny up thirty-foot trees. How shooting them, even in the face, only made them madder. How they especially seemed to stalk hunters and fishermen, perhaps perceiving them as competing predators. Of bears wandering away in mid-attack, then returning again and again to maul their victims with ever greater ferocity, as if to re-experience the pleasures of their violence. Meeting one in the wild was something of a rite of passage. If you were out here any length of time, the old-timers said, you met your bear. Trust me, they said, he is out there waiting on you.

Delaney's bear had now left the cedar tree and dropped down onto all-fours, snuffling the ground and moving toward him. He did not know if the bear had seen or smelled him but he felt certain he must have heard him. He could still hear himself, the sound his back thwacking down solid on the packed ground. Now he did not know whether to draw his sidearm and shoot the thing or turn and run like hell. He tried not to imagine what it would be like to be run down by a 500-pound bear. They like to chase things, the old-timers said, so don't try it. Shooting it also seemed like a bad idea. All he had

was the Colt in his belt—his Winchester was back with his horse—and a pistol seemed far too puny an instrument for the job. So instead he did nothing. He knelt motionless on the old Indian trail, hoping to make himself invisible, just another benign feature of the landscape. The bear had no natural enemies in nature, and through whatever mystical channels might exist between them Delaney tried reassuring this bear—his bear—that he was certainly not one. On the contrary. He was just a hapless, hatless fool who had let his horse throw him in this godforsaken Utah wilderness. He watched the bear come on another few steps, huffing now and clacking its teeth. Then it turned and went ambling off into the woods to the north.

Once it was out of sight, Delaney rose and began slowly backtracking in the direction his horse and mule had gone. As he went, he took stock. He was limping a little. There was a place above his ribs in the back that felt injured, how badly he could not tell. As he backed along, he came upon a series of items spilled from the mule's pack—skillet and coffee pot and flour sack. He collected these things one by one, half-expecting at any moment the bear, perhaps downwind of him now, to come barreling out of the thicket.

He found the two animals grazing together back inside the junipers. He had some trouble catching them up. He got the horse first but the mule kept turning deeper into the woods, putting more trees between them.

—Gonna meet that grizzly back in there you're not careful, Delaney said. Then what? You need to accept it, me and Sam here are the only true friends you got.

It took him several minutes before he had the animals rounded up. He repacked the mule's load and tied it down again, keeping his ears and eyes open for news of the bear.

—Showed your ass back there, the both of you, he said. Mule's one thing. He's got the excuse of being a mule. But I got to say I expected more out of you, Sam. What do you mean jibbing like that? Like to have broke my fool neck.

He tightened the cinches on both animals, then slipped the Winchester from the scabbard behind the horse's saddle. He levered in a shell and mounted stiffly up.

—You boys better hope I don't have to use this thing, he said. It'll just piss him off. But if I do, take my advice and don't try running this time. Bears like to chase things. They're like dogs that way. Oh, and they can cover ground about like the Dixie Express with a full head of steam. Or so I'm told.

He started slowly off holding the mule's lead rope in his left hand and with the rifle upright on his thigh. The animals moved reluctantly. They passed the tree where the bear had been, the tree bark shorn away to the height of a dozen feet. The horse kept tossing its head as if trying to erase the bear's scent from its memory, and he could feel resistance on the end of the mule's rope as well. Past the bear's scratching tree, the path began to rise again, and then they were out from among the firs and into a broad open swale. Behind him he could hear a kind of woofing but at a considerable distance, and then another sound, almost a keening. Both his animals lifted their heads, their eyes rolling.

—Come on, boys, he said. Just another bear in the woods. Nothing to write home about. We go our way, let him go his.

The following two days passed without incident although the terrain continued very difficult. The valley floors were deeply gullied and cut through with switchbacks and dry watercourses. There were cliffs and baroque arches hollowed out by the wind and reefs a thousand feet high, columns of stone rising above the open plain like monstrous silos. He did not know what he would tell the Mormons about getting their wagons through this land. Spicer was right, it was the roughest country he had ever seen, a wilderness of slot canyons dead-ending and turning back and forth upon one another like a wrinkled maze. He remembered what Spicer had said—

mockingly, as was his wont—about his having passed unawares through the Garden of Eden. The Mormons would not make the same mistake. They had embraced their exile, and their persecution was a gift out of which a new reality would be born. They were like the Israelites pledged upon the River Jordan. When he had walked across Missouri at age eighteen, whatever he was feeling had no name he could put on it. It was an action undertaken on impulse. Unlike most of his fellow travelers, he had no dreams of a promised land. He liked seeing new country, but appearing in such small increments it did not amount to much. Mostly what he had seen were the hindquarters of the oxen he was driving. Now as he rode through these wastes with the afternoon moon showing palely overhead, he was aware that Brother Smith and his flock would see all this differently. He remembered the look on Brother Smith's face gazing up through the keyhole rock at the gleaming slice of river beyond. Certainty was the saint's true armor.

He camped that night beside a tank in the rocks and in the morning woke to find eight inches of snow on the ground. He thought it strange that he had not been awakened by its falling. He was tempted to boil some coffee but the fire had died and there was little fuel about, so he collected his animals and started off again. All that day it snowed continuously—large, wet, oblate flakes—and so heavily that it became difficult to maintain any sense of direction. The landscape lay blurred and ever closer around him. In the afternoon it cleared but grew much colder, ungodly cold, some of the coldest weather he had ever known. It was if he had landed upon the surface of a moon identical to the one that had followed him since he crossed the Colorado River and come into this country. He spent that night beneath a rock ledge under the loom of what he took, very provisionally, to be the Elk Mountains. He scavenged up enough wood for a fire and melted snow into his coffee pot and cooked the last of his food, a single thick slapjack of flour and water. Judging by the state of his

provisions, he reckoned this to be his eighth day out and, if so, by that same reckoning, Christmas Day.

The next morning broke clear, and he rose shivering from his frozen bedroll to find his animals gone. He walked out beneath the trees where he had hobbled them and found the rawhide thongs cut through and lying in the snow. He had not thought it possible that there could be other persons about in this desolation but evidently there were. Navajos and Paiutes and Utes silent as ghosts. Or the Old Ones themselves, builders of these ancient stone keeps—actual ghosts. There had been new snowfall during the night and so no tracks. He stood looking about at the empty landscape, at the leaden sky overhead. Lost, snowbound and now afoot—it occurred to him that this place might become the final piece of the world that he would ever know. The thought did not strike him any particular way. He knew, however, that he would not sit down and wait for that moment to arrive. Perhaps a quarter mile off he saw a low formation of red rock thrusting up from the snow like a sort of broken tower, flat-topped and pyramidical, and he took this as his new point of reference. If he could get himself atop that rock he could at least take a look around, get his bearings, see where he was. Then he could decide what to do.

He turned and walked back to his dead campfire, gathered up his traps and set out for it. His feet felt frozen and useless inside his boots, like some sort of strange prostheses. On the trail from Escalante he had met a Mormon named Nielsen, a Dane, a man of perhaps sixty, who had come west with the original handcart brigades. Struggling through the mountains, his feet froze to the point that he was unable to walk. He had begged his wife to leave him. Instead, she had loaded him into the handcart with their other possessions and pulled him the rest of the way to Utah. Now Jens Nielsen made his way through the world with a curious hobbling gait, his toes splayed and his feet misshapen. But there he was, back at Hole-in-the-

Rock, a volunteer on this latest Mormon mission to colonize the San Juan.

Once he reached the sandstone scarp he set down his things and began to climb. It was only forty or fifty feet to the top, but the going was not easy. As he climbed he entertained the notion that he could not truly be lost, having had so little notion from the beginning of where he was. A guide, he had told them he was, and they had believed him. He climbed, fitting his hands into the icy crevices, trusting his frozen feet against the spire's flank. The summit was scooped out like a shallow bowl, and he was able to stand and look about. Just beneath the rising sun there was a range of mountains perhaps forty miles distant and another jagged formation to the north, black and iron-sided and peaked with snow. He did not bother consulting his map, even less a map now with its markings smudged and leaking from the page. He shaded his eyes and stood looking. He thought that the more easterly range might be the Abajos, which lay just north of his destination. If he could keep them on his left hand, he might be able to dead reckon a course. The sky, however, held the promise of further snow. He stood for a moment longer on his little promontory facing into this immensity, its features now everywhere obscured and blanketed white, erased almost in the manner of the places on his map. He stood a moment longer, then turned and made his way back down.

He walked all that day keeping due east as best he could and feeding himself on handfuls of snow and little red berries from the wintergreen bushes he passed along the way. It was the most walking he had done in a long time. He thought that his feet might eventually thaw out, but they did not. The effort of pushing them through the virgin snowfield was exhausting and the footing beneath the snow often uncertain. At twilight he entered another valley where the side walls were inset with more of the cliff dwellings, these now carrying long beards of snow. At the foot of the wall a dead cottonwood lay toppled on its side, and he stopped and broke off an armful of the skeletal branches and bore them up to the stone house. There

was a circular firepit set into the floor, its sides still bearing their ancient charcoal blacking, and he dropped his branches on the rim and stepped down inside. Squatting there, he managed to pull together a little heap of twigs and moss and strike a spark in his tinderbox and blow his frosted breath into the pile until he had coaxed forth a single finger of flame. Although he had done it many times before, he was struck anew by the miraculousness of this feat as well as by the image of himself performing it in such a setting. He watched the delicate spire bend and tremble on its axis as he broke up the frozen cottonwood and laid it gently on, branch by branch. With the success of his fire his spirits rose. In honor of the moment he began singing pieces of songs that he remembered from the Mormons. Sweet honey in the rocks. Treasure in jars of clay.

He was up at dawn. He stood up in his stone house with his icy blanket around his shoulders. The day was clear and very cold. The Abajos—if that is what they were—were still visible in the east. He gathered his traps, came gingerly down the cliffside and began walking. He walked for an hour, the exercise warming at least his inner core and making him conscious of the emptiness in his belly. Because the mountains created the illusion that he was not moving, he did not look at them. Instead, he kept his eyes upon the snow-covered terrain in front of him. For a thousand steps, two thousand—he was counting them—he remained focused upon the world underfoot. But then he stopped. The footing had disappeared. There was no more ground upon which to step. He realized then that he was standing upon a precipice. Left and right a zigzag fault had opened before his feet like a split seam in a garment. He took a step closer and peered over the edge. He could not judge the depth of the trench, its bottom being partially filled with snow, but the distance to the other side was at least forty feet. He looked north and south. There was no going around it, the jagged crevasse standing open amidst the blank snowfill like a broad jackolantern grin. He could not

detour. Already he could feel the cold leaching into his body, could hear his lungs wheezing for air, could feel his legs grown wobbly beneath him. He took one final look around. There was no help for it. He took his blankets and his rifle and clamped them to his chest, sat down in the snow and pushed himself over the edge.

He had no illusions about what lay beneath the innocent blanket of snow. Still, his idea was to proceed in the manner of a tobogganer, controlling his descent by lying on his back with his head up and steering with his feet. He willed himself to lightness. From the first moments, however, the foolishness of such a plan became obvious. He had not gone ten feet before he passed over a rocky ledge that sent him sprawling, and he went tumbling head over heels down the grade. He raised his blanket toward his face, but no defense was possible. The calamity he was experiencing seemed to unfold very slowly, with every jolt and collision more shocking than the previous one and the sequence somehow seeming choreographed for that specific purpose. When it finally ended, he was lying half buried in snow, turned backwards and looking back up the way he had come. He lay for a moment considering things from this perspective. There seemed an obscure connectedness in his recent experiences. First Henry Sykes diving into the snowbank. Then Sam putting him flat on his back when that bear walked out of the woods. And now this. Maybe the world was trying to tell him something. If so, it would have to spell it out a little clearer. Maybe if Moroni would suddenly drop down into this ditch beside him.

It took some time for him to gather himself and stand. He was a little surprised that he could. He had been in bar fights and run over by steers and once fallen forty feet when a scaffolding collapsed beneath him, but nothing approaching this. There was blood in the snow around him and on both of his hands. He turned and looked up at the opposite bank. His thinking had been that, once at the bottom, he would climb the other side, which appeared somewhat lower. Now standing there, he saw that he had been mistaken. He knew that his

body in its present state was entirely inadequate for such a task. So he did the only other thing he could. He turned and went limping off up the gully, headed north more or less, looking for a place he might climb out.

There were no such places, not for a long time. The chasm took numerous turnings but the walls on both sides remained steep and where not snow-covered were layered in friable sandstone and porphyry. He remembered his first view of this terrain from above, from the mirador to which the goat had led him, and how he had thought it resembled a labyrinth. His present situation seemed full confirmation of that impression. First the eagle's view, then the ant's.

For an hour he trudged along. He could imagine this as a sentence delivered upon some prisoner—to walk mile after mile through a bleak, unchanging world where the human senses were an irrelevance. He could feel the cold, otherwise he might as well be a blind fish in an underground cistern—deaf, sightless, knowing only the feel of the water. And so he walked. Nothing changed. The winds blew occasional gusts of snow through the gray sliver of sky overhead. He did not consider what he would do if he came upon his own boot prints in the snow. He did not wonder if he had died in his makeshift sleigh-ride and this was eternity looked like. Instead he walked.

And then finally he made a turn and came upon something different. He stopped to look. It was a series of shelves carved into the west wall of the trench. He turned and across the way he could see a second set leading up. He walked across to it. It was a staircase. The Old Ones had passed this way as well, it seemed, this deep gully a configuration of their world like the blind canyons, like the pine forest, like the ornate red stone pipes and spheres. They had come this way pursuant to some high task or purpose that called them down from their citadels into the unknown east. Brothers to the Mormons, perhaps, Lamanites fallen away from the true path, besieged by cannibal demons, now in search of a new beginning. He ran

his hands over the indentations, clearing the snow away. Then he began to climb, ascending this stairway like the ladder in Jacob's dream, the gradual ascent through virtue toward the tabernacle not made by hands. That night he slept again in one of the aboriginal houses, reflecting upon the strange permanence of all that was here, and the next morning when he rose—his third day without food—he took his knife and inscribed his own initials—WED—into the rock beside the previous scrapings of other men. His pocket watch, never useful, had long since frozen so he left that too, wedged into a niche near his mark. Then he cut the skirt from his one remaining blanket and bound these strips around his broken boots and set forth again.

That final day, in the way he later came to think of it, was one of particular uncertainty. The light had grown very dim, so much so that the time of day could not be told. The snow provided all the light there was. At some point—he could not have said whether it was morning, noon or afternoon—he found himself stopped upon the banks of a stream. Through the haze he could see the stream flowing swift and black between its banks. He was standing beneath a cottonwood upon whose bare branches the snow had collected in tapered heaps. He turned again toward what he thought was north, trying to find a place where he could cross the stream without doing himself further harm. The way east now lay open before him but across how many more empty miles? Somewhere in that direction on a bend in the San Juan River lay the Mormon fort named Montezuma. He could imagine it. A dozen cabins built in a square for protection against the Indians with their entrances facing inward and a stone rampart connecting them. There would be a flag flying, made of shirts dyed red and blue. A log council house and food cooking over a communal fire. He could see it. Even had his map survived, however, he knew there was nothing there that would have taken him where he needed to go.

It was sometime later that same day, or so he thought, that he came upon the cow. He had forded the stream at a place

where a narrow sluiceway ran through the frazzle ice, his feet recording nothing of the cold. He had stepped out onto the other bank and resumed his hobbling gait and did not see the cow until he was practically on top of it. It was standing in the track not ten feet away looking at him. This was no exotic goat with amber eyes but only a common dairy cow, yet it seemed as unlikely a thing to meet here as a woolly mammoth on Spruce Street in Scranton. Moreover, this particular beast looked familiar. He would swear it was the brindled heifer that his father kept for milking, which had been one of his childhood chores. He tried to imagine what other artifacts of his former life he might happen upon. The cow had been pulling at a frozen tussock of grass, and now it returned to its business. He did not know what to do. The cow seemed to present some opportunity for action, but he could not think what that might be. All he could think of was lying down across its back and going to sleep. He thought for a moment of the goat that had led him off into this labyrinth, and when he looked up again the cow had vanished.

And so he walked on. He knew that he had a finite number of steps left to take. He walked in as straight a line as he could, using the footprint he was setting down to guide the one following. There was no sun, no mountain range to guide him. Lacking a distant landmark, he bent forward, his eyes upon the ground, scrutinizing each stone and patch of snow as it appeared. He let subjects rise to mind as they would. He was astonished by this process, and it was some time before he realized that there were no subjects, just two voices conversing. He did not recognize either of them, nor the third that broke in occasionally to correct or reprimand the other two. They were like the voices he had heard that first night camped beside the Colorado, the sound of the river sibilant, insistent, never-ending.

It was half an hour later that he came upon the camp. A man and two boys were squatting before a fire cooking food. As with the cow, this image seemed to rise up from out of the

ground, and it startled him. He did not know these people. He could not place them in his former life. There was a Dutch oven on the coals and meat frying in a skillet. The three faces looked up at him, this blanket-clad will o' the wisp hobbling in from the cold, his eyelids closed, his face sheeted in frost. For a moment time seemed to stop, with all parties uncertain how to proceed, then the man rose and helped him gently to the fire. He sat down chattering and grinning among them, looking from face to face and at the food on the fire. The phantasm cow now stood tethered to the tailgate of a wagon. The man hooked the top of the Dutch oven open, pulled off a biscuit and dropped it smoking into his upturned hands.

The camp was a Mormon one—eight adults and eight children—bound for Fort Montezuma. Food was short. To make bread they were grinding their seed wheat in a coffee mill. The men hunted but game was scarce. These wagons had come west from the San Luis Valley in Colorado and were two months out. Their progress had been slow. They were making no more than three or four miles a day. They reckoned that their present supply of food might last them another two weeks. To earn his keep, Delaney did what he could around the camp. He helped manage the livestock. He collected wood and water and took the animals down to drink, sometimes breaking up the ice with an ax. He slept at night with a family named Dobbins. There were two brothers, ages nine and eleven, and their sister, a girl of fifteen. The children slept in the wagon bed, and the adults rigged a tarpaulin and slept underneath. The girl's name was Ella. Dark haired and dark eyed, she had the haunted and careworn look of a much older woman. In Montezuma she was to be married to an elder named Gottfried, his fourth wife. One evening, taking the stock down to the spring to drink, without a word she slipped her hand into his.

Sometimes he sat with Mrs. Dobbins, tending the fire while she cooked. He had been with them nearly a week before she spoke to him.

—We know who you are, she said.

He looked at her, not quite sure that she had spoken. Her eyes were on the cooking pans.

—Who? he said.

—You are a Danite. Sent by President Young.

—No. President Young has passed away. Over two years ago now.

—Sent by President Young's successor then, President Taylor.

—No, he said.

—Sent by President Taylor to admonish us for our dilatoriness and weakness and lack of resolve. The two men they sent before, the ones who preceded you, the so-called scouts, they drank whiskey and quarreled among themselves and proved unworthy. We knew he would send someone else. Someone stronger. Purer of heart.

—No, he said.

—The Sons of Dan. At their horses' snorting and neighing the whole land trembled. The Destroying Angels. Elder Porter Rockwell's Legion of Myrmidons. If not sent by him, by his successor. The scriptures say that there must be atonement. Atonement in blood.

—No, he said.

—The Destroying Angel, she said. He travels under many names, none his own. What is it that you are calling yourself now?

He looked down at her hands in the firelight. They were red and worn and ragged looking.

—Robert Springer, he said. That is my true Christian name.

During the times she wasn't speaking he could hear her moaning, very softly.

—We know who you are. We recognize you. Mormon Bob, the Gentiles call you. We know that you were there at the execution of Elder John D. Lee. It was he who brought down the judgment of the Danites upon the Gentiles at Mountain Meadows. It became your task to deliver justice upon Elder Lee. Your obligation. You shed his blood upon the ground that it might ensure his salvation. And now you are here among us, to chastise us for our inconstancy and dilatoriness. Our apostasy. For it is written, 'I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong to set in order the house of God.'

—No, Delaney said. I was there at Mountain Meadows, that's all. I wasn't one of the ones who shot him.

The woman had been speaking very softly. He was remembering John D. Lee, the destroying angel of Mountain Meadows, sitting on the edge of his open coffin in his black suit with two of his wives in attendance, ready to meet his Redeemer and join all those who had gone before him since the prophet Joseph Smith had unearthed the golden plates on Hill Cumorah and put them upon this path. Ready to part the veil and pass through into the real world beyond, this present one being but an illusion and the kingdom of the incarnate exceeding it by a factor of infinity to none. If illusion it was, however, it was an illusion of wondrous depth and sophistication. He was remembering the red tablelands, the wind-hollowed arches and spires and minarets, the fairy world through which he had passed, the maze of canyons overwritten as with some revelation, though from him withheld. Of trudging through the snows, his eyes upon each successive square of earth. He leaned forward trying to make her eyes meet his.

—The Danites, he said. That's all a myth. Make believe. Or maybe it was true once but not anymore.

She raised her eyes.

—How do you know? she said.

—Did you see me when I walked up on Brother Harris and his sons in their camp? Starved, half-frozen—would be dead if they hadn't taken me in. Look at me—

He opened his arms to the firelight so that she might examine him, this ragged scarecrow.

—Do I look like a destroying angel to you?

Now she lifted her head further to look him in the face. Her eyes moved back and forth as if trying to assemble some composite impression from any number of disparate pieces. Then she returned them to the fire where the iron vessels were cooking the food.

5. Gazetteers

J.O. Dunbar, reporter for and editor of the *Tombstone Republican*, was putting the final touches on his account of the trial, to be sent out as an exclusive to the *San Francisco Examiner* before being dropped onto the Associated Press wire for the papers back east. His friend Horace Stillman had stopped by, as he frequently did, to smoke a cigar, and they were joined by Marcus Aurelius 'Mark' Smith, district attorney for Cochise County.

—Glad to see this whole sorry business finally laid to rest, Dunbar said. Multiple murders followed by a legal trial and multiple legal hangings followed by a mob forming—a citizens' meeting, they called it—followed by a lynching. Sort of a salmagundi salad, I guess you'd have to say.

—Quite a production all the way around, Stillman said, propping his feet up on the corner of Dunbar's desk. Bad enough that Sheriff Ward sent out a thousand printed invitations to the hangings but then you have Roy Constable building a grandstand to hold another 600 so they could gawk in over the fence. Buck fifty a head. Like the circus had come to town. Ice-cream vendors. Candy apples. Even some shill outside selling miracle tonic from the back of a gypsy wagon. Nellie Cashman and her boys took care of that, however. Pulled him down off his cart, and Bob Paul locked him up for public nuisance. And just in time—otherwise we might have had a second lynching on the undercard.

—Ah, the redoubtable Miss Cashman, Smith said. She and her mad Irish friends. Determined to let these lads, evil doers though they might be, die dignified deaths. Her boys also made quick work of that grandstand business. Marched up there at 4:30 in the morning and pulled the whole thing down. They don't call her the Miners' Angel for nothing. They'd follow her anywhere.

—Which meant the spotlight fell squarely on Sheriff Paul and his amazing five-man trap, Dunbar said. Now there's a man with an eye for spectacle.

He picked up a section of newsprint and read.

—'The drop will be supported by several triggers or bolts. These triggers are attached to a through brace and will be drawn back together by means of a heavy weight that will be let drop from the platform. The five men will drop together, and the drop will be sufficient to insure instantaneous and painless death. Among the designers of the gallows is Pima County Sheriff Robert H. 'Bob' Paul, and what Bob don't know about 'working off' a man neatly and artistically wouldn't make a very large book. Taken whole, the structure should excite the admiration of the most talented hangman.'

Dunbar dropped the paper on his desk.

—From our distinguished competitors at the *Weekly Citizen*.

—Didn't go off altogether without a hitch, however, Stillman said. No matter how artistic Bob might have had it set up.

—No, Dunbar said. Looked like only the one got his neck snapped clean. The others danced awhile. The big fellow—Dowd—was a long time dying.

—Not a pretty thing to see, Smith said. But of course it had to be done. Justice in an imperfect world. The mills of the gods grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine.

The three men sat smoking and looking out the window onto Fremont Street.

—Why do you suppose they did it? Dunbar said.

—Did what? Stillman said.

—Not the robbery at Castaneda's—I understand that part—but standing outside shooting up and down the street. Killing innocent folks randomly. That speaks to a kind of underlying evil—madness even.

Stillman shrugged.

—Who can look into the hearts of men like that? During the holdup didn't one of them say, 'We'll teach these sons of bitches who's running this town'?

—Yes, Dunbar said. That was the big fellow, Dowd. He was the one who came back inside the store looking for more rifle loads after he'd shot up all his.

—It's called hurrahing the town, Stillman said. A time-honored cowboy tradition. They are called outlaws for a reason, you know. Spitting on all that decent folks hold dear. The idea of towns and churches and schools is anathema to them. They're anarchists, like those fellows back east tossing bombs through the post-office windows.

There was another period of silence.

—Read us what you have so far, Smith said.

Dunbar looked down at the page of foolscap in his hand and began to read.

—'In summarizing the great events of these past tumultuous weeks, our first order of business must be to pay homage to our devoted officers of the law. It is no child's work to follow up canyons and track desperate men, who may fire at you from ambush at any moment, and it is only the most sagacious and fearless men who dare to undertake pursuing parties. It is a perilous duty. Being officers of the law, they had a pride—an ambition to succeed, which rises above and beyond all other considerations.'

—Good, Smith said. No need to mention how that two thousand in reward money might have stiffened their resolve.

—'As for the trial itself, our praises must fall upon the pillars of our judicial system—attorneys, jury and officers of the court. Judge Pinney presided in the most dignified and impartial manner. The counsel appointed to defend the prisoners did all in their power, although the task was hopeless. Murder and robbery in Cochise County are played out. All honor to the brave Bisbee men who listened to reason and allowed the majesty of the law to be maintained. Prevalent opinions had been that not more than five minutes would be required by the jury, the evidence being so plain; but time

rolled by until fully half an hour had elapsed, and still no verdict. The countenances of the prisoners, which had been cast down in gloom as the jury slowly filed past them, lightened up, as the lengthening time seemed a chance for a disagreement. But then word came that the jury had reached its verdict, and that would be that the defendants were guilty of murder in the first degree, as charged in the indictment.'

—There you have it, Stillman said. Habeas corpus, a vigorous defense, an impartial judge, a responsible jury and a humane execution. All the trappings of a true system of justice.

—Nice touch, that reference to the five minutes, Smith said. Harry Reed told me that neither him nor any of the other jurors could see the need for deliberations but decided that Judge Pinney might not appreciate it if they just turned around and came filing straight back in. Not after that hour of instruction he had just given them. Somebody had a deck, so they sat down and played a few hands. Took it up to thirty minutes exactly by Ike Kemp's watch and came in with their verdict.

Dunbar looked up at him.

—Perhaps I should include that.

—No, Smith said. Keep reading.

—Perhaps mention in passing some of the other holes in the case. Nothing you couldn't drive a Conestoga wagon through.

Now Smith removed the cigar from his mouth and held it up away from his face.

—What do you mean?

—Let's review for a moment. On December 13, five days after the shooting, Deputy C.B. Sanders and a posse from Deming are trailing what they think are the gang that robbed the Southern Pacific at Gage Station. Instead, they flush these other fellows—three of them, anyway—who make good their escape in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. A posse member identifies two of them as 'York, alias Kelly' and 'Red.' Meanwhile, an item appears in the always reliable *Arizona Daily*

Citizen, stating that two of the robbers, Red Sample and Tex Howard, have appeared at a bawdy house in Clifton in possession of some of the Bisbee loot, including a gold watch, where they tell an unidentified woman that the other perpetrators were Dan Dowd, York Kelly and William Delaney. There you have it. An unattributed newspaper report citing hearsay from an unnamed prostitute. That's it. The five names get put together for the first time.

—What's your point?

—Just this. The only two actually identified inside Castaneda's were Howard and Kelly, one of whom decided to rob the place unmasked and the other whose mask came off. When he was caught, Howard had the gold watch and $200. But the only testimony to connect the other three is that news story and what Frank Buckles said about their being together at his ranch before and just after the robbery. And he changed his story from what he first told Billy Daniels. Delaney wasn't with the others either time. And Frank Haith, the best you can say about him is that he was a known associate, owned the saloon in Clifton where these boys all congregated. While they had him locked up, he seemed to know a lot about the Bisbee business, and I guess that was enough for them to name him the ringleader.

—What are you saying?

—Just that it's all a pretty thin gruel when you think about it. Still, you take that crowd of so-called Cowboys hanging around Clifton—and Charleston, too, at Stwart's place—it's true enough that if they weren't particularly guilty of the Bisbee killings, they were probably guilty of something just as bad. You run a dip net through an establishment like that, you wouldn't come up with anything but water moccasins and snapping turtles.

—That's a good way of looking at it, Smith said. It's like my old pappy once told me. 'I can promise you this,' he said. 'If you don't wind up paying the price for the things you damn well know you did wrong, you're sure to pay the price for those

you didn't. It all evens out in the end.' One of the truest things he ever said.

—Exactly, Stillman said. And with our infant territory inching its way toward statehood, it is going to be essential to clear out these criminal infestations. They have congregated out here like blow flies around a fresh cow pie.

—I suppose, Dunbar said. It's just sometimes I worry about getting things right. Those institutions you were just talking about—the lawmen, the witnesses, the judge and attorneys and jury—that's a pretty long chain to try to make stretch, and some of those links are a little loose in their own right. Seems kind of a wobbly way of getting at the truth.

He tapped the sheaf of pages with his forefinger.

—The fourth estate, you know, Horace. The fourth pillar of that nascent civilization you were just speaking of.

—Here we go, Smith said.

—Legislative, executive, judicial—and an independent press to ride herd on all of the above, to keep things honest. That power comes with a responsibility to tell the truth. What if the story here is different from what's been made out?

Stillman leaned forward to tip off his ash.

—All very fine, John. But you realize that in about two weeks this is all going to be ancient history. If a few eggs get dropped and broke, you still have the omelet to consider. Aint that the important thing?

—Ancient history is right, Smith said. Especially if they don't figure out a way to keep the water out of the Grand Central and the Contention—and these other owners don't step up and pay their fair share—there soon won't be any Tombstone to keep track of.

—So a hundred years from now maybe we'll be like ancient Carthage, Dunbar said. Still, you'd like to think that we tried to do things right.

—Too deep for me, John, Stillman said. Weren't you the one who was telling me just the other day that your only two

purposes in life were to sell papers and advance the fortunes of the Republican party in the Arizona Territory?

—Sounds like something I would say, Dunbar said.

—Think about it, Smith said. These six here, they all claimed they were innocent to the end. Now we know for a fact that isn't true. But that's the code for men like this. Not admitting their guilt, no matter how damning the evidence—they smile and brazen it out. It's their final gesture of defiance, of thumbing their noses at things like truth and honor and justice. I should know. I've seen a thousand trials. All six of those men knew they deserved hanging—like you said, if not for this for something else. Who says the punishment and the crime have to match up perfect?

— I suppose you're right.

—Keep reading, Stillman said.

—'Make no mistake, the outcome of this trial has been watched with the greatest interest not only by the citizens of the Arizona Territory but throughout this great country of ours. The feeling is that Cochise County will put down crime of every character and especially that committed by the element that prefers to consider that a six-shooter, a good horse and a pair of spurs are the model marks of a desirable citizen. The prompt capture and equally prompt conviction of the Bisbee murderers at Tombstone shows that the Arizona authorities are determined to stamp out the lawlessness which has been a great bar to the development of the territory. The age of the Cowboy has passed.'

—Bravo, Smith said. Boldly stated.

—'In the eyes of many so concluded the grandest day Cochise County has ever seen. Who would have thought, two years ago, that five men would be hung in this Cochise County at the same time? How much better it is to let the law take its course.'

Dunbar paused.

—'It now behooves that we pass on to the fate of John Haith, the sixth of the Bisbee Cowboys, who was not present at the shooting. His defense was led by Colonel Herring,

whose summation lasted for more than an hour. The distinguished advocate met with a round of applause at the end of his argument for the very skillful manner in which he made the worse seem the better cause. It was evident that his cunning sophistries and ingeniously spun themes made more than a passing impression on some of the jury. As a result the jury was out for nearly five hours before returning a compromise verdict of murder in the second degree, as a result of which Judge Pinney passed the sentence of imprisonment for life in the Yuma Territorial Prison. Now this verdict was met with almost universal dissatisfaction. The cry went up that such a thing as a compromise verdict was not warranted either by the evidence or the law—that John Haith was either guilty or not guilty of the crime of murder charged against him. Suspicions rose that further evidence against him was not brought out in the proceedings—that he was, in fact, the prime mover of the affair. The result was the appearance at the Tombstone jail of one hundred armed and angry men from Bisbee. They took John Haith from his cell and proceeded down Toughnut Street with the prisoner walking along at such a rate that the rope securing him seldom grew taut. There the mob finally stopped beneath a telegraph pole a block and a half from the courthouse, and in a moment the body was dangling at the end of a rope from a crossbar of the pole.'

—Hmm, Smith said.

—'Lynching is to be regretted on general principles, as showing a belief in the community that the law and its methods are inadequate in certain emergencies. There is no evidence to show that an innocent man was the victim in the late Tombstone lynching. Haith was assuredly guilty, and should have perished on the scaffold with the rest, not hanged by a mob. We deprecate such acts, and hope it may not occur again. The law in the Territory to-day is ample, and the judges and people are in favor of carrying out the spirit and letter of the law, and all attempts at mobocracy are wrong and should be resisted by the law-abiding people.'

—Good luck with that, Smith said. You saw what Doc Goodfellow wrote in the coroner's report? 'Cause of death from the effects of emphysema, which might have been caused by strangulation, self inflicted or otherwise.'

—Yes.

—Somebody asked him the meaning of 'emphysema,' and he said it was something that causes shortness of breath at high altitudes.

—Well, Stillwell said, putting his feet down onto the floor. That's that.

—Not quite, Dunbar said.

He turned the sheet and read another paragraph, which he had written on the back.

—'One final remark, of a personal note, if that may be permitted. This is not the place for eulogizing outlaws. You will find no sickly sentimentalism displayed here for a cold-blooded murderer in an Arizona community. Still, it must be admitted that the case of William Delaney is a strange one. This reporter found him not only gentlemanly but one who made an interesting companion and who could converse in an intelligent manner on almost any subject that came up. Except for his continued acquaintance with the other five defendants prior to the robbery, there has been nothing in the testimony given or evidence found that proves beyond a reasonable doubt that young Delaney was involved in these misdeeds. No witness to the crime has been able to identify his horse, or any item of clothing he was wearing, nor were any of the spoils of the robbery found upon his person when he was arrested. Perhaps this was all cunning and subterfuge. One is reminded of the Bard's immortal words:

So may the outward shows be least themselves:
The world is still deceived with ornament.
There is no vice so simple but assumes
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.

One year ago who would have made the prediction that in twelve months William Delaney would be a felon standing under the shadow of the gallows? Such a man would have been considered a lunatic. Yet such is the case. It ought to afford many a young man a topic for serious reflection, this downward career of W.E. Delaney. Avoid evil companions if you do not desire to be carried down the swift-flowing current which leads to dishonor and an unmourned grave.'

Dunbar leaned forward and dropped the paper on his desk.

—Excellently done, Smith said, replacing his cigar in his mouth and clapping his hands lightly together. Give them a little Shakespeare as postscript. Put it in proper perspective.

—Yes, Stillman said. Most apt.

—Dowd, Kelly, Howard, Sample, Haith—all hard cases, Smith said. And then you introduce the subtle counter strain—a young man of promise fallen into bad company, led astray as it were. Admirably done.

—Perhaps. On the other hand, some folks think that young Delaney might have been the hardest case of them all. If the eyewitness accounts can be credited, he and Dowd were the two who did all the shooting out in the street and so were the actual murderers. It would have been Delaney that killed Tappenier and Annie Roberts and her baby, then turned his gun on Tom Smith. As I said before, difficult to get your arms all the way around this thing. Still waters run deep, I suppose. Your old pappy have any thoughts on that subject, Mark?

—Nope, Smith said. He was pretty much of the opinion that if it looked like a duck, quacked like a duck and hung around with other ducks, it was probably a duck.

There was a period of silence.

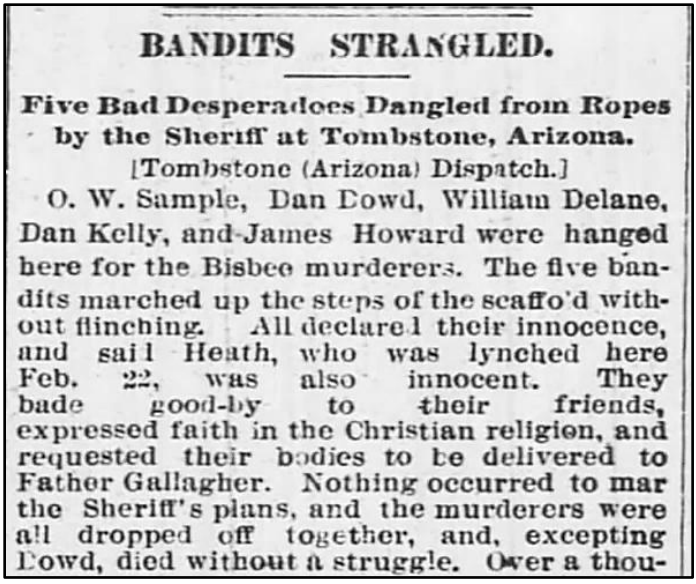
—Here, Dunbar said. Let me jot that one down for future reference.

He took up his pen and scratched out a line or two, then removed his spectacles and set them down on his desk atop his article. He looked up at Stillman.

—Horace, wasn't there some talk about this Delaney fellow being a friend of Octavia's? They were seen together in church, or so I heard.

Stillman leaned forward to stub out his cigar.

—Hell, John, he said. There's all kind of talk.\



BANDITS STRANGLED.

Five Bad Desperadoes Dangled from Ropes by the Sheriff at Tombstone, Arizona.

[Tombstone (Arizona) Dispatch.]

O. W. Sample, Dan Dowd, William Delane, Dan Kelly, and James Howard were hanged here for the Bisbee murderers. The five bandits marched up the steps of the scaffold without flinching. All declared their innocence, and said Heath, who was lynched here Feb. 22, was also innocent. They bade good-by to their friends, expressed faith in the Christian religion, and requested their bodies to be delivered to Father Gallagher. Nothing occurred to mar the Sheriff's plans, and the murderers were all dropped off together, and, excepting Dowd, died without a struggle. Over a thou-

6. Marchbains

Being a deposition sworn under oath by Elihu Marchbains, M.D., D.Sc., offered in rebuttal against the various charges levied against him, April 1, 1884.

Yes, I was in Tombstone for the hanging of the Delaney boy, although of course I knew them all. These were, after all, the men and women among whom I had chosen to spend a goodly portion my life, in the pursuit of my chosen vocation. To begin, it is my intention to address some of the various insults, falsehoods, calumnies, innuendos, and other assaults upon my person, both verbal and physical, to which I have been subjected during the course of this whole unfortunate business.

1. In Tombstone, Arizona Territory, during the week preceding the execution of the five 'Cochise County Cowboys,' which occurred March 28, 1884, I was attacked by a local mob incited by one Nellie Cashman, the so-called 'Miners Angel,' which pulled me down from my wagon and handled me in a very rough fashion. My offense? Merely attempting to help the good people of that place avail themselves of the advantages of a healthful tonic, which, while perhaps of no definitive somatic benefit, would certainly do them no harm. Under the circumstances, it seemed important to offer some life-affirming alternative to oppose the somber spectacle which they were on hand to witness. I shall leave off observing, with respect to Mrs. Cashman, how few humans are qualified to wrap themselves in the mantle of sainthood and add that, when I protested my harsh treatment to the proper authorities, instead of receiving justice, I found myself being hauled before the bar and made a laughingstock in the press. What irony that I should be singled out for censure in such a place as

Tombstone, Arizona Territory! I will point out further that in this chain of events one may observe the operation of the four basic institutions of an ill and backwards society, viz., a lawless populace, a corrupt constabulary, a sham religiosity and a press—the vaunted fourth estate—that glozes and misrepresents all. Of course, in my travels I have grown accustomed to such treatment. One might almost say that it is a hazard of my profession—the rule rather than the exception. More than law and order, primitive communities require scapegoats—in particular, strangers upon whom they may heap communal guilt and blame—a practice which the ancient Hebrews were by no means the first to employ.

2. Concerning the incident with Captain Emilio Kosterlitzky, which occurred in the Sonoran desert of Mexico just north of the pueblo of Moctezuma (previously Oposura) on or about December 22, 1883, the reasons for my presence there were exactly as I have stated. At that time, as the result of certain circumstance beyond my control, I had set aside that part of my practice dealing with photography and others of les beaux arts, many of which uneducated persons superstitiously think of as necromancy. The word ambrotype, used to denote the amber-hued tintype, derives from the Greek ambrotos, meaning immortal. At that time, however, I could detect little enthusiasm among the Mexican populace for achieving immortality through this particular means, their attentions being directed instead towards bullfighting and cemeteries and roadside monuments (descansos), of which there are a great many in that land and which, from an aesthetic perspective, paint the entire country in a sort of winsome, melancholy sepiatone, and, even more frankly, imbue it with a somewhat cloying incense of death. And so my business among them was strictly a matter of selling tonics.

As for Captain Kosterlitzky, my dealings with him were limited to being cast as a sort of Mephisto or stage villain in whatever private study he was conducting of Mr. Delaney. In specific, he seemed keen to deliver some observations upon

the relation between punishment and crime. I cannot pretend to understand fully his purposes in this regard; I shall only observe that it pays one to be skeptical of such notions as frontier justice, as the recent lynching of Mr. John Haith ("Jack Heath") in Tombstone has perhaps demonstrated. And where, may I be so bold as to inquire, was that renowned paragon of law and order, Sheriff Robert H. Paul, when this unfortunate event was taking place? When this individual—found not guilty of capital murder by a jury of his peers—was being strung up from a telegraph pole on Toughnut Street in this very town? Why, busy locking up a harmless Doctor of Medicine, as previously noted.

But I digress. Allow me to return to the day of my interview with Captain Kosterlitzky, Dec. 22, 1883. It is true that after the other members of his troop had departed, William Delaney approached me in private to inquire after what had at one time been a component of my stage performance—I am speaking here of my diorama—and although it was apparent he had never actually seen this object in operation—as, in truth, I made but very sparing use of it—I was reasonably certain that he must once have been a member of one of my audiences. For this reason I signaled Benjamin, my majordomo, to launch into his stage limp, in the hope of good-humoredly recalling those bygone days. This harmless by-play was interrupted by the arrival of three others of Captain Kosterlitzky's company, who came forward seeking bottles of my elixir to treat various ailments—all of them either excretory or venereal in nature, of course—inter faeces et urinam, you know. It was in their presence, and to them, that I addressed my final words in connection with Mr. Delaney, viz., that some men are never quite the same after partaking of my elixir. I do here attest and affirm that I believed that statement to be accurate at the time I made it, its truth having been demonstrated upon many prior occasions, as it undoubtedly proved true in this. Were he here, I feel certain that Mr. Delaney would readily confirm that his final days in

Mexico, following his single draught of my medicine, were full of signs and wonders—revelations, even, I dare say.

I shall close with a final word concerning the character of Captain Kosterlitzky, who flattered himself a sort of stage-manager during our encounter—I almost said magus—a source of near absolute power on the Sonoran frontier. Certainly he dressed the part in his uniform and sombrero and high leather boots—a figure of his own creation, an authoritarian colossus bestriding the world—Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos all wrapped into one. However, as in all such cases, one must consider to what ends such power is directed. And so let us review. It will be recalled that his intention was apparently to suggest that Mr. Delaney and myself had met under circumstances specifically foreseen by him, as a sort of jeux d'esprit in which the potential danger of Apache Indians was converted into a comic encounter with a harmless medical 'quack' rather in the manner of the magician's trick in which a tiger becomes a lady. The looks of amusement upon the faces of the captain's men—his audience—said it all. What he failed to realize, however, was that the impact of our meeting could prove far more problematical for Mr. Delaney than any simple skirmish with the indigenes. In this sense one glimpses a would-be maestro not fully in command of the outcome of his experiment. Moreover, this little japes only prepared the ground for a far darker and more cynical comic turn—I am referring, of course, to the series of events by which Mr. Delaney, his allegiance and trust now secured by Captain Kosterlitzky, was delivered by the most devious of means to the dungeons of Las Minas Prietas. Permit me to observe that it has been my experience that such treacheries seldom go unpunished but tend to redound upon the heads of their perpetrators; and my instincts tell me further that, given the shifting sands of Mexican politics as well as the military profession in which he so prides himself, the good captain will one day, like King Belshazzar, be tried in the balance and found wanting. It is also important to bear in mind that the braggart

soldier, miles gloriosus, was one of the earliest stock figures in Attic comedy.

3. Concerning one Antonio Sandoval, a priest riding in Captain Kosterlitzky's company, with whom I had the briefest of encounters, I have little to say, except to note that he was quite correct in pointing out how manifestly unqualified the captain was in offering his views on any matters beyond the strictly military, viz., religion, science, philosophy, the arts, human nature, et cetera. As for Father Sandoval himself, I make no judgment of his priestly bona fides. I shall only point out that the warrior monk is a familiar story-book character, the best known of whom were the Knights Templar, guardians of the Camino de Santiago through Moorish Spain. It was this 'Santiago' that the Spanish have chosen as their patron saint—he in a former life the apostle James, simple son of Zebedee, but now reincarnated in the Iberian mind as Santiago Matamoros—Saint James the Moor-slayer—so-named because of his appearance in AD 834 upon the plain of Clavijo, clad in armor with his white beard flying, where he helped King Ramiro slay 5,000 Muslims. All the sheerest nonsense, of course, but even so a representation deeply ingrained in the hot-blooded Mediterranean imagination, this image of the priest hitching up his vestments and riding into battle against the unbeliever. It is thus no surprise to find a priest—even if only a play-acting one like Fra Sandoval—among Captain Kosterlitzky's company. The Catholic church has been launching crusades against assorted pagans, infidels and heretics for a thousand years, its role in Spain's amassing of a colonial empire in the Americas being only the most recent example. Secure in its conviction that it is the devil that it is fighting and not the hapless natives themselves, the Catholic church has underwritten the violence by which the Indians of the New World have been subjugated, enslaved and now finally pushed to the brink of extinction. In the face of this genocide, the veneration of certain individual priests, such as the

Dominican Las Casas and the Jesuit Eusebio Kino ('padre a cavallo' indeed), as purported friends to the Indians, can only be viewed as an exercise in cynicism.

4. I turn now to the incident in Silver City, New Mexico Territory, which occurred at some unspecified date, possibly in 1881 or 1882, and is at the heart of the charges raised against me. It will be recalled that the only offense alleged upon that occasion involved my providing a dose of my elixir to my second, Benjamin, who had positioned himself in the audience and, following time-honored comic tradition, was affecting lameness, for which my tonic purported to be a cure. Now, it must be acknowledged that faith-healing—that mysterious process by which the body mends itself, outside any apparent medical intervention—has a long and distinguished history. I shall mention only Elijah, Jesus, Saint Paul, Saint Jude, Our Lady of Lourdes and The Virgin of Guadalupe as notable practitioners. In terms of specific miracles, it will also be recalled that Our Lord Himself bade the cripple by the pool of Bethesda to take up his pallet and walk. Now, I intend no sacrilege nor make any such claim for my own powers. I say only that my methods of healing are similar, with scientific and psychological thinking standing in for the religious, and that this public reenactment may have a salutary effect upon those predisposed to my particular offerings of deliverance.

Instead, of course, it was alleged that I was perpetrating a hoax upon the public. I was denounced as a mountebank, the poor, simple fellows having no notion that what they perceived as a term of derogation implies no such thing. The word derives from the Italianate monta and banco, and so means to mount upon a bench, which is an exactly accurate description of my activities standing in the back of my wagon. In its most basic sense, a medicine show is a demonstration, a performance intended to entertain. Regrettably, however, owing no doubt to the essential baseness of human nature, my audiences must sometimes impute malevolent intentions to my

harmless—and, in fact, frequently diverting—patter. Is it not a healthy thing to listen to well-turned oratory, to laugh along with one's fellows in the public square, to have the quotidian squalor of one's daily existence lifted for a few moments? Instead, they prefer to think themselves being played for dupes—or worse. They imagine that they are being taken for their pathetic little dollars and half dollars. And, most of all, they see standing before them someone who can easily be made a victim. In short, they see the opportunity to convert a harmless and good-humored spectacle into something far more entertaining—which is to say, an exhibition of cruelty and violence. Such is the residing spirit in many a primitive culture, of which the American West is most assuredly one. Why, even its 'judicial system,' with Sheriff Robert H. Paul's celebrated execution machine, his five-man trap, is testimony to this truth. (Duly lionized as he is, Sheriff Paul may wish to keep his vanity in check. In December 1862 thirty-eight Dakota Sioux were hanged simultaneously in Mankato, Minnesota. And in the year 71 BC, following Spartacus' unsuccessful slave revolt, the Roman consul Crassus crucified 6,000 slaves along the Appian way—roughly one every forty yards for 120 miles. Travelers could enjoy a leisurely afternoon moving from one writhing victim to another like visitors to a museum).

But to return to the incident in Silver City. The Cochise County Cowboys first indulged their taste for sadism by shooting bullets very near poor Benjamin's feet—known, in Cowboy parlance, as 'making him dance.' Further, they then seized upon him, plying him with strong drink, under the influence of which he described certain feats of magic which I had allegedly performed in other western settlements, at other times. In passing, allow me to point out the obvious: that said feats always seem to take place elsewhere, and survive only in hand-me-down accounts and stories. In this particular case he was correct, however. I was at one time a magician of considerable powers before, like Prospero, I cast my staff into

the sea. With regard to the two acts attributed to me by Benjamin—namely, shooting orbs of fire from the palms of my hands and causing a herd of cattle to disappear and then reappear in the town of Casper, Wyoming—I actually did perform these tricks, as well as many others which he did not see the need to enumerate. What is important to remember, however, is that such acts involve no necromantical manipulation of objects in nature but only the management of the perception of one's audience. Through my long association with Benjamin as a test subject, I acquired the ability to place him inside any illusion I cared to conceive. Moreover, I could achieve this through a simple look or gesture. Such are the powers of suggestion if one only commits the time and effort necessary to their development. All magic works in this manner. The audience wishes to believe what it is about to see, and so it does. At the height of my powers, I could work this magic upon large groups: explain to them the illusion they were about to encounter and then ask them if they had seen it. Invariably, they would say they had, if only out of the fear that their neighbor might have witnessed something miraculous that they, through some failure of their own powers, had missed. Why, one of my colleagues—Dr. James I. Lighthall, known far and wide as 'The Diamond King'—is famous for his demonstrations of pain-free dentistry, with which he begins every performance. By-standers are invited up to have their teeth drawn free of charge, and painlessly. Each is provided with a single dose of his Spanish Oil, a noted blood purifier and liver regulator. Then, while a brass band plays, Dr. Lighthall begins working at a tremendous speed, moving along his line of patients and tossing each extracted tooth high into the air. It is something to see, I do assure you. Do you imagine that his patients are going to complain of pain, given the wondrousness of these surroundings? To do so would spoil the illusion for the others, don't you see? They wish to be a part of it. Why, Dr. Lighthall claims to have an entire garden walk at his home in Peoria, Illinois, paved with human teeth, and I see no reason to doubt

him. It is little different from attending some gospel tent service during which, at the height of the preacher's adjurations, the congregants begin dancing, speaking in tongues and imagining themselves transported into some celestial realm. The illusion passes from one to another like a contagion. The underlying psychology is simple. All people are joined together by gossamer threads of empathy, difficult to see with the untrained eye but very real and very strong, like the spider's web. They wish to see miracles and so they do. I have touched already upon the long history of faith-healing, religion itself being nothing more than a form of magic. And so, yes, I told Benjamin that I had made him because in a sense I had. Through my operations upon his psyche, the limitations of his previous self were transcended, and he entered a new life. Who can be said to have fully awakened without having these scales removed from his eyes?

I shall now proceed to the matter of the glass plates—collodion plates, to be precise—which the Cowboys discovered in the back of my wagon. Before I do so, however, permit me to speak of the Cowboys in general terms. I remarked at the outset that I have spent considerable time among them, as indeed I have. I have visited their camp high in the Chiricahua Mountains. That is where they gather, three hundred strong, a veritable Valhallic host, when not engaged in wreaking havoc upon the general public. They come from every background and class, every state and territory and many foreign nations—all bound by their commitment to lawlessness and vicious living. Among them you will find former Texas Rangers, disgraced clergymen, bigamists, parricides, counterfeiters, swindlers of women and children's funds, miners who have treacherously slain their partners and left their corpses at the bottom of lonely pits. Oh, they make a grim and dusky crew, I do assure you, as they sit around their fires at night with the jars of liquor passing freely among them. This is the communion they seek, and it is for this reason that

they have set themselves up in the badlands of Arizona—Jonahs all, keeping themselves far from God.

And so to return to Silver City and the Cowboys' discovery of the collodion plates in my wagon. It was as if they had chanced upon some singular evidence of witchcraft, demonology and the black arts. They were scandalized by images that they could not construe—barnyard animals, infants in coffins, women with their backs turned—but more, they were terrified to find among these plates so many images of themselves. Here were their own likenesses curated in a more or less permanent form—recall ambrotos… immortal. At the conclusion of his sitting each man received a small replica portrait to take away—but the glass plates remained with me. And so, naturally, they inferred that by some nefarious and unholy means my intention was to possess their souls. What a charming, insouciant and old-fashioned notion! As if they possessed souls available for the snatching! No, whatever ethereal substance may once have resided within them was long since flown. All that remained were their likenesses, like those empty cicada shells one often finds upon fence posts and paving stones. And so I captured their images, which was all that remained of them—these personae that they had created for themselves, enhanced through various stage props (hay bales, firearms, prairie vistas with grazing buffalo, etc.) and etched into the glass, preserving them forever. It was a feat of science and art, not of theology.

And it was this notion, I think, that terrified them so. You see, they would have much preferred to have believed in the finality of their mortal bodies, but they could not. To a man they carried the unshakable conviction that hell was real. They could never free themselves of this superstitious illusion instilled in them as children. In an important sense they were all children still. Did they not, from their final prison cell, each dictate, or pen in crude block print, letters to their mothers? What unsinkable sentimentality! It was all of a piece, all constituting a significant part of their romantic appeal to the public—that they could so willingly allow their souls to be

rendered forfeit. Read through the accounts in these dreadful western penny posts and you will see what I mean—forever fawning over the coolness with which these desperadoes meet their earthly ends. Like God's rebel angels, in their stubbornness and pride, they would embrace the prospect of eternal suffering in continued defiance of Him. Oh, I know you will say that the five Cowboys reportedly were converted to the Catholic faith before Father Jouvenceau in the Tombstone jail. And I shall say in response that, for any objective observer, this must appear a cynical gesture, in the spirit of Pascal's Wager—an inauthentic hedging of bets entirely in keeping with the overall degenerateness of their natures. What they really could not bear to face was that no grandiose hell awaited them, no smoking sulphuric pits and Ixion turning upon his wheel. No. God had no such plans for men such as these. Instead, all that remained of them was their likenesses—their husks—captured on my plates. This was their hell, self-created. They saw the horrible truth. And even though sitting down before my camera had been their idea not mine, as their photographer I was conceived as the agent of their damnation. Here they were in my collection, preserved like flies in amber—this the only immortality they would ever know.

The final component of the Silver City affair—its centerpiece, I suppose one might say—is the diorama which I had the Cowboys remove from the back of my wagon and bring into the Acme Saloon—an instrument whose operation so discomfited the one Cowboy who tried it that the others were persuaded to let me go upon my way. What was the nature of this machine, you ask? What dread contents awaited the man bold enough to press his eye to the aperture? I know that the diorama will necessarily call to mind that wretched business of the Wandering Jew who, at least in some versions of his myth, travels the country accompanied by such an apparatus. Suffice it to say that I find any such comparison both invidious and wildly inaccurate. What you really wish to

know is what was inside the box that caused that Cowboy—what was his name—Charley Bigelow?—what was it that the Cowboy saw and carried inside himself for the remainder of his days? You wish to know, and so I will tell you. It was God, of course. Charley Bigelow saw the roving eye of God which tirelessly scans all of creation, and he saw It moving until finally It fixed upon him—the seer seen. And how did I manage this illusion, you ask? Ah, a magician must not divulge his secrets…that is what you expected that I would say,—but no, as I said previously, I am not the sort of performer who wishes to keep his audience in the dark. Quite the opposite. You wish to know, and so I shall tell you. The aperture through which the viewer looks inside is really an ingenious mirroring camera—one of my own invention, of course. The eyeball—the all-seeing eye—projected onto the inner wall of the diorama is really the viewer's own, moving and casting about to see what the box contains, before finally locating and then stopping upon itself. The impact of such a thing—watching the eye watch itself—is not to be underestimated, nor its philosophical profundity doubted. Reflect upon this matter and you may discover that the philosophy of this device, like that of my elixir and the collodion plates, all follow from the same principle.

5. Octavia Stillman. And now I shall provide a piece of information not presently in the public record, so far as I know. It should not surprise you to learn that I also encountered young Octavia Stillman during the course of my travels through the Arizona Territory. It was sometime in late summer of 1883, after William Delaney had come to live in the Mule Mountains mining camp. Benjamin and I made a stop in Bisbee; I sold a few bottles of tonic to the miners; and I saw Octavia Spillman standing on the periphery of the crowd. It is no boast to say that I have known considerable success selling my product among the womenfolk wherever my travels have taken me. The contents of my elixir are easily adjusted to suit the requirements of each individual locale. Thus, when

entering a territory with a large female population, I am careful to prepare a version of the formula that includes as one of its principal ingredients the blessed oil of the poppy, which serves admirably to blunt the effects of the toil and tedium that are almost inevitably the woman's lot, both back east and even more so on the frontier. Tombstone, for example, was a ready market, with hundreds of bottles sold to the soiled doves up and down Allen Street. Why, Mattie Blaylock, wife to the famous lawman Wyatt Earp, purchased three dozen bottles for herself, finding it superior to the cheap laudanum and tinctures of morphine and powdered opium available locally. And so in Bisbee, as I have said, when I saw Octavia Stillman standing at the rear of the crowd I saw a potential customer. I remember that she was wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat and was positively glowing with health. After the crowd had dispersed, I approached her. She politely refused my offer of a complimentary bottle but did consent to join me for a cup of coffee, which we took at a café table set out beneath a tree. We spoke of our common backgrounds—mine in Salem, outside Boston, and hers in Bridgeport, Connecticut—during which she ventured off upon a curious aside involving a community of people who communicated through signs rather than speech—the People of the Eye, she called them—which led to an even more curious digression concerning the barns of the Pennsylvania Dutch. For the duration of this conversation I watched her closely. It soon became clear to me that her case, while interesting, was far from unique. Women came west for many reasons, and the effects of this new country upon them varied greatly. Why, many of the ladies of easy virtue I had seen in Tombstone had come west as perfectly respectable women but had taken up new lives owing to a multitude of causes. Some had been abandoned by their husbands, who had caught gold fever and failed to provide them support. Others entered this demimonde for purely economic reasons, there being a great deal of money to be made among the free-spending miners. And then there were the freedom seekers,

those intent upon escaping the twin bondages of marriage and monogamy. I would have thought to make a collection of their images, as I did the Cowboys, were it not for the suspicions of salacious intent that would inevitably have followed. As I say, I studied Octavia Stillman closely. She seemed to imagine some similarity between my line of work and that of Mr. P.T. Barnum, a native of her own Bridgeport. She asked me about my name, which I freely admitted was one I had chosen for myself—a good Biblical name, after the fourth of Job's comforters, so different from the other three. The intention behind my choice, I should add in passing, was far from what had been inferred by the ersatz-priest Sandoval—Eliphaz to Kosterlitzy's Bildad. It lay not in Elihu's chiding Job for attempting to justify his own actions rather than God's, but in the fact that Elihu wrote the book in which Job's story is told—and that Job's story is the oldest story the Bible has to tell. At any rate, hearing this, she remarked with a sly smile that she also had recently taken a new name, which she was not at liberty to divulge, it being a private matter between herself and another. From this revelation it was an easy thing to deduce the connection between her and Delaney, as other inquiries I had made in Bisbee had apprised me of the gossip attending the operation of their little mining camp in the Mule Mountains. Perhaps this is another reason I thought I recognized the young man on that December morning in Sonora. Like many things decreed by fate, it may be prefigured several times before coming to pass. By that time he had only three weeks remaining to live as a free man, and only three months left walking the earth. Perhaps, too, this may explain why I felt compelled to return to Tombstone and be present at his trial. I thought of it as the third and final act of our little personal drama.

And so we did meet again. This last rendezvous took place in a small anteroom just off the cell which he was sharing with the other accused. It was not my idea. He had seen my wagon on the street and requested that I be brought to him. He spoke to me sardonically, accusing me of dogging his trail

and speaking of my name, of which he had gathered some partial understanding (I saw a Bible in his cell). He mentioned that nearly everyone he had met in the West seemed to be traveling incognito or under false pretenses, even those who had not troubled to adopt a different name. He seemed inclined to cast the whole business in something of a satirical and metaphysical vein. I then heard his confession. You are surprised? The others had their sleek priest, this Father Jouvenceau; William Delaney had me. He said that his month in Mexico had been like the final chapter of a book. He said that it brought to a conclusion something that had happened to him in the mountains of Utah four years previously. Something about being lost in the canyons and the snows. Something about cliff dwellings and three mountains—Elk, Mule and Deer—and a Greek boy torn apart by a pack of hounds. Something about an imaginary marriage to a Mormon girl named Ella—I didn't get it all. It did not seem like something one was expected to understand or even remember. But all confessions are like that, at least in my experience.

Octavia Stillman was in attendance at Mr. Delaney's trial, at least for the first day of it, but he did not acknowledge her, nor she him. The courtroom was located on the second floor of the Cochise County courthouse, and she took a seat in the rear. As expected, the trial drew a very large crowd, with many women present, this primarily owing to the glamorous appeal of the Cowboy defendants. Because of the number of defendants and their throng of attorneys, the accused were seated not in the dock but along the east wall of the courtroom, partially facing the gallery, but Mr. Delaney never looked once out into the audience. Not so his comrades-in-arms, who found numerous occasions to affect a careless attitude and to imp and mug and play the fool when spotting familiar faces in the crowd, like boys in a school play. As for Octavia, I watched her face throughout the proceedings—through the reading out of the charges and Delaney's plea (like those of his fellows) of not guilty delivered in a firm, clear voice—without detecting

signs of any powerful emotion in her. The one moment she seemed to falter, as if a chill had passed through her, occurred as the accused were being brought upstairs from their dungeon below the courtroom. They were manacled together two by two, and the sound of their chains as they ascended those twenty-seven steps was quite a harrowing one. Speaking for myself, it brought to mind Mr. Dickens' character Jacob Marley—dead seven years and bound up in the chains of his transgressions—slowly mounting the stairs outside Ebenezer Scrooge's rooms. For those inclined toward moralizing, among whose number I happily count myself, the conjoining of the present scene with the harsh music of those chains offered ample opportunity for reflection: upon the likelihood of these unfortunates soon joining the ranks of the wandering, unhappy dead; of the dread sound of purgatorial penance approaching and the inevitability of divine judgment (as opposed to the shabby article of what passes for 'justice' here on earth); of the message of regret for wasted opportunity and the lost possibility of a rebirth into a life of service, charity and love. Of course, as a purely disinterested spectator, I had leisure to indulge in such speculation. For Octavia Stillwell I am certain that this was not the case.

None of these details made their way into the local newspaper accounts, of course. How could they? Information such as I am providing requires a skilled and subtle interlocutor, with no personal axe to grind. The aim of journalists, on the other hand—especially those of the slapdash, frontier variety—is not to arrive at the truth of the matter but to arrange sentences into a crude semblance of literacy as a means of convincing their vulgar and largely unlettered readership that they serve as a beacon of enlightenment in this benighted hinterland. One can imagine these drudges, toiling away in the service of whatever powers that be—dodgy local politicians and shopkeepers and district attorneys—supposing that what is written there may pass for truth, rather than being the most arrant claptrap. 'The grandest day Cochise County has ever seen'—this because five men

were hanged? 'All honor the brave Bisbee men who listened to reason and allowed the majesty of the law to be maintained'—excepting the one case in which they strung poor Mr. Haith up from a telegraph pole? And did any of these watchdogs of nascent frontier democracy actually peruse the so-called evidence put forward in this case, or note the sort of individuals charged with seeing 'justice' served as a result?

Likewise, one searches in vain among these accounts for some glimmer of psychological insight into the underlying causes of this tragedy. For the ancient Greeks this human element was paramount, their term for it being hamartia, meaning that specific fault or failure—that missing of the mark—that allows one's baser nature to triumph over his better angels. The case of William E. Delaney, lately of Scranton, Pennsylvania, certainly invites such scrutiny. A young man of talent, born into a respectable family and the possessor of a considerable intellect, he finds himself hanged in his twenty-eighth year. The question of his guilt in the Bisbee shooting aside (no witness could place him there except for Daniels, the pool-shooting deputy, who claimed to have seen him warming himself briefly before the saloon stove), what can our intrepid correspondents tell us of the nature and character of William Delaney, and of the road that brought him to such a pass? Not very much, as it happens. First, predictably, there is the requisite quotation from 'the Bard,' noting how the world is oft deceived by ornament and outward shows, etc. etc. Then, descending from cliché to bathos, we find ourselves met with the following nugget of sage advice: 'Avoid evil companions if you do not desire to be carried down the swift-flowing current which leads to dishonor and an unmourned grave.' Can there be any doubt that these rustic scribblers are true inheritors of Pope's dunces, 'scrawling with desperate charcoal round their darkened walls?' It is enough to make one tear at one's hair and go screaming out into the night. But make no mistake: when the good people of Tombstone and Bisbee and Charleston gather to read these

same remarks—read or, more likely, have them read to them—they will nod their heads in unison. 'True, true,' they will mutter together. 'Oh, alas, how very true.'

And so it becomes the task of your present correspondent to provide the story of William Delaney with a more fitting dénouement, the only one it is likely to receive. Whether the man's life ended in 'dishonor'—an odd term—is not for me to say; what I can tell you is that his grave was not 'unmourned.' Although Octavia Stillwell was not in attendance at his trial beyond that first day, she heard that I had spoken with the lad, and so she too sought me out. It seemed as if I had been chosen to serve as go-between in this final assignation between them. It is not a role with which I am particularly familiar, nor unfamiliar either. The remainder of her story—its plain particulars—was recited to me at that time, and was much as I had expected. She had met Delaney in Tombstone just over a year ago. She had known something, but not all, about the ten previous years he had spent in the American West. Some of this time, she learned, had been spent among the Mormons in Utah. She had not known his whereabouts during the period extending from just a few days after Thanksgiving through Christmas 1883 and into the present year. However, she knew his to be a restless spirit—not unlike her own, she said. They had made no promises to one another. She had no desire to circumscribe his world, to bind him to a life he would not choose willingly for himself. In that sense theirs was what might be termed a 'modern' relationship. She knew, of course, about the Bisbee shootings—word had reached the Mule Mountain camp the following day, a Sunday. She did not think to connect William Delaney, however. Why would she? That did not occur until his name came out in the newspaper. The preacher's wife, a Mrs. Fairbairn, had ridden out, newspaper in hand, knowing that Delaney had been working on the place—and suspecting, or so Octavia said, a good deal more. The Apache had paid them a visit once, Octavia said with that same smile of hers, which was something Mrs. Fairbairn likely held

against her. For Octavia's part, she did not believe the lady cut out for the West.

Faithfully submitted,

Elihu Ahasuerus Marchbains, M.D., D.Sc.